



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

WIDENER



HN NTQY N

Thr 199.22.9

**Harvard College
Library**



**BOUGHT FROM THE FUND
BEQUEATHED BY**

Evert Jansen Wendell

CLASS OF 1882

of New York

SHOUTS AND MURMURS

SHOUTS AND MURMURS

ECHOES OF A THOUSAND
AND ONE FIRST NIGHTS

BY
ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

AUTHOR OF "MRS. FISKE," "THE COMMAND
IS FORWARD," ETC.



NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.
1922

Thru 799.22.9

✓



Mendell fund

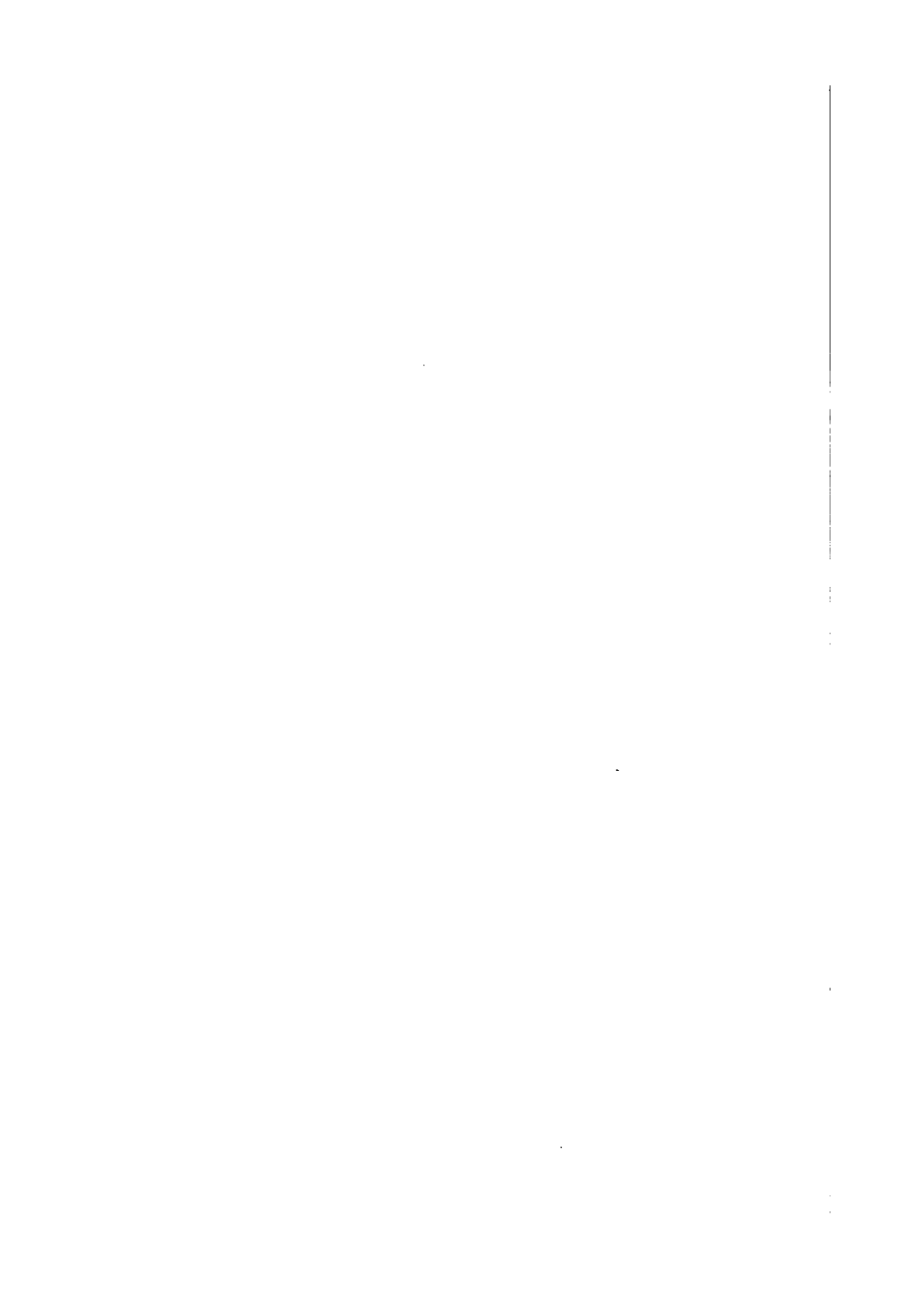
Copyright, 1922, by
THE CENTURY CO.
Copyright, 1917-1922, by
THE NEW YORK TIMES COMPANY
Copyright, 1921, by
THE RIDGEWAY COMPANY
Copyright, 1922, by
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY
Copyright, 1922, by
VANITY FAIR PUBLISHING CO.
Copyright, 1922, by
THEATRE MAGAZINE CO.

Printed in U. S. A.

46-6
3333
46

FOREWORD

And there sat in the circle at the Players' Club one who spoke always with the accent of authority, giving firmly the impression that his own story and the story of the theater were two inseparable strands of the same woof. Indeed, he sometimes referred casually and hazily to five seasons passed at dear old Drury Lane. But one day some one asked him point-blank what his rôles there had been. He had to explain then that his talent had always been devoted to off-stage noises. Finally he showed a Drury Lane program, yellowed and creased and wine-stained. There his name was at the end of the cast and opposite it was the rôle assigned him—*Shouts and Murmurs*.—OLD FABLE.



CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I BEHIND THE SCENES	1
1. An Emergency Masterpiece . . .	6
2. O. Henry, Playwright	15
3. The Shadow on a Great Success	31
II THE KNOCK AT THE STAGE-DOOR. . . .	41
1. "Born of Strolling Players" . . .	41
2. The Swarming Amateurs	53
3. Dr. Gundelfinger	57
III GUNPOWDER PLOTS	68
IV CAPSULE CRITICISM	77
V FOR THE KIDDIES	88
VI BITTER MEMORIES	96
VII THE TERRIBLE TRANSLATION	104
VIII ANOTHER FOREIGN AUTHOR	110
IX THE CELEBRATED DECLINE OF THE DRAMA	125
X PRESENTING "FOGG'S FERRY"	137

CHAPTER	PAGE
XI EUGENE O'NEILL	144
1. "Beyond the Horizon"	148
2. "The Emperor Jones"	156
3. "The Hairy Ape"	161
XII DEBURAU, PERE, AND GUITRY, FILS	171
XIII THE LEGEND OF "PETER PAN"	185
XIV IT WAS "TRILBY"	212
XV "PALMY DAYS"	223
XVI MR. TINNEY	236
XVII THE "CHAUVE-SOURIS"	247
XVIII ZOWIE; OR, THE CURSE OF AN AKINS HEART	255

SHOUTS AND MURMURS

SHOUTS AND MURMURS

2 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

There you may find, as I did, that *Henry Clegg*, that mean, shifty little sport of St. John Ervine's invention, was, most incongruously, a rabid collector of Masfield's "The Faithful," of which I found no less than eighteen copies when I got too near Henry's book-shelf on the Garrick stage. There you may undergo the shock of seeing the king, who had swept so magnificently and so carelessly up the marble staircase of his palace, now painfully undertaking the descent on the reverse side of the scenery, picking up his ermine like Victorian petticoats over a puddle and groping for the ladder rungs with poor, stringy, unkingly shanks.

There, in extreme cases, you may even find that the queen, who from the sixth row on the aisle had seemed so shy and delicately fastidious a lady, is, on closer inspection, a person of coarse mien, a good fifteen years older than she had seemed, given, when provoked, to a fishwife's vocabulary and prone, when depressed, to finding solace in gin.

And you yourself are likely to appear in an unfavorable light and even to have your mission misinterpreted. I am thinking sourly of one evening when an innocent errand took me back-stage

and I was somewhat violently mistaken for a process-server in pursuit of the wage earned there weekly by the talented actress who was ruined each night in the antecedent action of the play then in the bills. And I think there is a moral for all of us to ponder in the back-stage mishap which befell Charles Hanson Towne, poet, *bon vivant*, and some time editor of "McClure's Magazine."

For years Mr. Towne had cherished an ardent admiration for Mrs. Fiske. He longed to know her, yet, while his wanderings in the city had brought him at one time or another into converse with most of the players of the day, it so happened that he never encountered Mrs. Fiske, who is the lady of the byways, never easy to find. Finally, however, his great chance came. At Henry Miller's Theater in New York there was to be a benefit, one of those endless benefits which constituted New York's share of the burden of the war. Mr. Towne was on the committee of arrangements and Mrs. Fiske was to be on the program. While she was on the stage, reading a poem probably, he planted himself in the wings, beneath the switchboard, ready to waylay her when she should come off. Off she came and

there was Mr. Towne blocking her path. "Mrs. Fiske," he said, and then poured out, in lyric prose, the admiration he had been nourishing these many years. It was, I have since heard, a lovely speech, and well delivered, I am sure. At the end of it Mrs. Fiske tapped him affably on the arm with her lorgnette, gave him one rewarding, devastating smile, and, as she tripped off to her dressing-room, murmured: "Thank you, Mr. Electrician."

No, an actual journey back-stage is not to be recommended. I am suggesting rather an excursion among the circumstances which have determined certain of the plays of to-day, a look into the biographies of certain tragedies and comedies which are alive now in the theater here or abroad. Of every play that finds its way to an audience in New York or London, a story of mishap and aspiration might be told, a story unknown to the fellow who sees only what is to be seen within the frame of the proscenium arch, but which, if known, would, I think, add measurably to his pleasure in the memories of the performance.

I am uneasily aware that such pokings about into the invisible regions of the theater are unknown in the high and dry places of dramatic

criticism, but it seems to me that they are not illegitimate. I suspect they are considered a trifle *infra dig.*, but they furnish pleasant excursions and, it seems to me, legitimate ones. Of course, if the playwright under examination is dead, it is not considered too inquisitive and journalistic to weave some of the circumstances of his life into the accounts of his work, and if he has been dead so long that you cannot find out anything about him then your mere attempt to do so will be rewarded with at least one LL.D. But if he is alive and you can conduct your research by no more difficult and ingenious a process than that of walking down the street and asking him, why, then it just is n't done.

For my own part, I like to know of "The Green Goddess," for instance, that the veteran and previously blameless dramatic critic who wrote it was moved to do so because he dreamed its scenario. I like to know of the pensive "Deburau" that it was written by a farceur in the belief that he had only a year left to live on earth. I like to review O'Neill's plays in terms of his unusual heritage and his unusual preparations, and I believe that some reference to that heritage and some account of his sea-rovings be-

6 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

long in any decently communicative review of an O'Neill play as it comes along. Of such inquiries and such reports the pages of this book are full.

I

AN EMERGENCY MASTERPIECE

QUIETLY, modestly, with none of the preliminary boasting which is so often the work of the weaker psychologists of the theater, a little homespun comedy sneaked into New York in October, 1920, and established itself overnight as one of the best, if not the best, ever written by an American. It is called "The First Year" and is the work of Frank Craven. He has fashioned for himself a piece so unpretentious, so true, and so enormously amusing that it will find a response and a welcome in every American town that is big enough to have a theater at all. If the ordinarily successful comedy could run, or at least hobble, a whole season on Broadway, there seemed to be no good reason why "The First Year" should not run forever.

The words of the title refer to the fact that the

first year of married life is the hardest, that a girl can never really know whether she has confided herself to the right man until after she has lived with him for a while, when, after considerable regrets and misgivings, it is more likely than not to dawn on her that her choice was somehow good. The slightly tipsy and exceedingly disconsolate young husband, in the midst of their first serious quarrel, sadly advises their dusky hand-maiden, who has "got a offer," to "begin her marriage with the second year."

This thin trickle of orthodox philosophy runs through a play that is as simple and wholesome and familiar and American as a plate of wheat cakes or a book by Louisa Alcott. It is a comedy of every-day domestic life in a small town that shows the kind of observation which salted "The Rise of Silas Lapham" and the kind of homely humor which flavors a Briggs cartoon.

Usually when our dramatists write of the forest primeval they do so from the vantage-point of a Broadway hotel, composing their thoughts to the souging of an electric fan and the gentle splash of ice in a tall drink. When they write of small towns, it is in memory of painful one-night stands, and they cut their characters out of the comic

8 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

papers, so that we have the recurrent comedy sheriff and the whole horrid tribe of gosh-dern dramaturgy. The author of "The First Year," on the other hand, has seemingly thought to draw his material from life. It was a good idea.

Here we have a play so natural that all around you in the audience you can see people nudging each other and hear them whispering: "Is n't that just like us!"—a play so utterly untheatrical that it gets breathless over such humdrum crises as the serving of the soup before the melons.

Yet "The First Year" is the work of a Broadway actor—the nervous rush work of an actor frankly in need of a job.

That such a play should have come to us from such a person is only superficially surprising. Back of "The First Year" are all the conditions which make (and always have made) for good work in the theater. Such work, from Shakspeare's day down to John Drinkwater's, has always been done by people who were of the theater and yet not of it, playwrights and players who were workers within the theater's walls and yet somehow had learned, mentally or physically, to get away from it.

To begin with, Frank Craven was born of show

folks. They say his lineage can be traced direct to that eighteenth-century giant of the English circus who, after his retirement, set up the Craven's Head Inn in Covent Garden. But, anyway, his father and mother were modest troupers in the theater of the seventies and eighties and were playing with the Nat Goodwin-Eliza Weathersby Froliques when Mrs. Craven had to drop out of the cast in time to permit Frank's advent into the world. She caught up with the company a little later and Jennie Weathersby stood sponsor at his christening. When his first play, "Too Many Cooks," was staged on Broadway seven years ago, one of the best performances in it was given by the author's godmother.

Craven seems to have spoken his first lines from the stage as soon as possible after his learning to speak at all. That was when he was three, and the play was that trusty old stand-by, "The Silver King." Afterward he played many parts, often a mere walking gentleman, or rather toddling gentleman, going on in his mother's wake, as when, for instance, his father and mother acted *Mr. and Mrs. Micawber* and Master Craven played one of the many reasons why that great lady would never desert *Mr. Micawber*.

Those were the days when it was an established New England custom for needy troupers to take a town hall or op'ry-house for Thanksgiving or Christmas and put on a show in the hope of paying for their own festal meals thereby. Of such "turkey dates," as they were called, the Cravens kept many. They would get through the lean months somehow as summer boarders, and it was at such a farm-house near Reading, Massachusetts, that young Craven was deposited to grow up and go to school.

From a youngster of five to a sapling of eighteen he was a farm boy doing all the chores and going through all the phases of young Jack Hazard, riding old Dobbin bareback to the meadow and melting away each summer when the hay had to be pitched to the high, stifling mow. In winter he went to the district school two miles from home, where there would be an attendance of as many as thirteen pupils on those days when the snow-drifts did not block the roads or when the needs of spring plowing did not decimate the roll. Often only two pupils made the grade (as you might say), and one of these would usually be Craven. You may be uneasily aware that this sounds like a biography leading straight to the

White House rather than to the playhouse, but whether or not Craven would rather be right than President, you may be dead sure that he would rather be playwright than President.

He was eighteen and working in the canning factory when chance ran him into an old stage friend of his folks, and the first thing he knew they were for trying him out as an actor. The play, as it happens, was still "The Silver King," for theatrical fare in America had undergone no revolutionary changes in the intervening fifteen years. Thus Craven went back to the stage, carrying with him memories and instincts and sympathies he could not have had if he had never left it. Many of these appear in "The First Year."

This comedy of his is full of the little touches of lifelikeness which keep an audience warm with what, for want of a defter term, must be called the emotion of recognition. They are such vignettes of humanity as writers note and tuck away in their memories meaning to use some time. You would swear "The First Year" was a play over which its author had thus puttered lovingly for many a season. It is, therefore, the more disconcerting to learn that Craven wrote it not be-

12 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

cause, after long accumulation, it fairly clamored for expression, but because no one seemed to be offering him a part and he was in need of one; that he wrote it in a great hurry because that need was urgent. He began it in the middle of the night and in a time of great discouragement just twelve weeks before the New York première.

It had been a long time since he had had any success in the theater. He had tried two plays and they had failed. He had ventured to London, where an old favorite of his, "Too Many Cooks," was being put on with an otherwise English cast and under a contract so disadvantageous that, after a faltering run of two weeks, it was ruthlessly evicted. Suffering by this time from a serious inferiority complex and incidentally from an acute shortage of funds, he came home and went to work on a new play, and when two acts were written he carried them around one Sunday evening to read them aloud to those shrewd men of the theater, John Golden and Winchell Smith, as prospective producers.

They listened politely, suggested some changes, said they would n't mind hearing the last act when he had finished it, and helped him to a cab. When the tottering Craven reached home, he said:

"Well, *that's* cold!" and buried the unfinished script in his mental scrap-basket.

He would try once more. What should it be about? Well, once when he and Mrs. Craven had been playing pinocle in a Chicago hotel, they were talking about the first year of married life being the stormy one, and Craven said that it might serve as a good theme for a play some time. Out of his subconsciousness he now fished that random idea, sketched a rough scenario, sent for some black coffee, put his pencil to paper, shut his eyes, saw a small-town sitting-room at lamplight time, saw the father reading the local paper, the mother sewing, the daughter strumming at the piano while she waited for the grist of evening callers. He listened. They began to talk. He began to write. The first act, pretty much as you see it now, was finished before he went to bed. ✓

If nowadays Craven is being complimented for this work ground out under great pressure, if he is being petted and puffed for his great wisdom and penetration in devising certain touches and twists which, as a matter of honest fact, he shoved hurriedly into his play without thinking about them, why, it only evens up for laborious past

14 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

efforts of his which somehow went unnoticed, and it is, in his own case, history repeating itself.

Craven's biggest success as an actor was scored at the Playhouse that September night in 1911 when he walked off with most of the honors of George Broadhurst's vigorous and even violent comedy, "Bought and Paid For." His rôle then was that of *Jimmy Gilley*, the fourteen-dollar-a-week shipping-clerk who adhered so expertly to his wealthy brother-in-law. It was an uncommonly droll performance, which he played to the hilt. The next morning the papers were full of him, and what amused him most was the critical approval paid his painstaking costume, which was at once sporty and threadbare, even to the socks. Actually his socks got a notice all by themselves as a supremely ingenious bit of theatrical costuming. Of course Craven smiled and buried deep the fact that he had selected those socks because they were the only pair he had in the world.

It had been a lean period before that rescuing rôle of *Jimmy Gilley* came along. His mother's last illness had come just the summer before, and from her high rooms in Forty-eighth Street he had been wont to look down to where the builders were completing the Playhouse in time for the

new theatrical year. He had grinned when she used to say cheerily: "You never can tell, Frank. You might play there some time."

But so it came to pass. The play of Broadhurst's was chosen to open the new theater. Before the première, Mrs. Craven had died. The night of the opening Craven, waiting for the first curtain call, sneaked out on the fire-escape to steal a few puffs from a cigarette. Dimly in the darkness above he could see the window that had been hers and he stood staring up toward it till the call came. "Well," he said, blowing a kiss up into the darkness, as he turned to obey, "wish me good luck." And so, with a trembling in his knees but a benediction in his heart, he started for the scene that was to lift him to the stars.

2

O. HENRY, PLAYWRIGHT

WHEN, if ever, they call for a new edition of that amiable biography of O. Henry by C. Alonso Smith, there should be added a chapter about his adventures as a playwright. To be sure, in the final stretch of this official history of

16 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

Sydney Porter, the recording professor does say parenthetically: "Plans for a novel and a play were also much in his mind at this time, but no progress was made in actual construction." Nothing, however, is vouchsafed as to what that play was, how it got into the aforesaid mind in the first place, and why it never came out. It never did come out, for, as a playwright, O. Henry was a little brother to that forlorn fellow who figures in Augustus Thomas's reminiscences and whose successive lodgings in New York were always traceable by stray bits of manuscript which had never progressed beyond the brave beginning: "Act One, Scene One: A Ruined Garden." To that family of dramatists O. Henry belonged. It was a large family. It still is.

This is really George Tyler's story. He is one of those managers who are ever and always exploring for playwrights and players where no one else has looked. His ardor has always been addressed to the task of growing a dramatist where only a novelist grew before. He and Kipling, for instance, have spent unchronicled hours in conference over a *Mulvaney* play. But that is another story. Tyler would, I think, derive more heart-warming satisfaction out of extracting four

acts from some reluctant teller of tales than out of any contract he could sign with the most tested and chronically successful dramatist of the day. And just as the late Charles Frohman, by an incorrigible and disarming doggedness, finally badgered the bewildered Barrie into writing for the theater, so Tyler hoped to make a playwright of O. Henry. He never encountered him on a street-corner or dropped him a note about one of his stories without nagging him to try his hand at a play.

Every O. Henry story naturally prompted such a hope. Every one of them fairly tingled with the stuff of which plays are made, and much of that stuff, rented or borrowed or blandly stolen, has since found its way into theaters all over the world. But it was much easier to write a story, and for a while the Tyler blandishments had no visible effect. The drowsy dramatist that is probably in all of us, and that was certainly in O. Henry, stirred uneasily in response to the Tyler proddings, but never really wakened.

O. Henry's connection with the theater had been slight and discouraging. He had, in a needy moment, written the libretto of a musical comedy called "Lo," for which Franklin P. Adams in-

18 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

generously fashioned the lyrics and A. Baldwin Sloane the music—a promising but impractical triumvirate whose first and only effort started boldly out from Chicago, wandered erratically around the Middle West for fourteen weeks, and then died somewhere, alone, neglected, and unsung. New York never saw it, and neither, for that matter, did O. Henry.

Then, in a sudden fit of industry, he drew up a scenario for a comedy, perhaps with the solemn intention of writing it, but more probably in the hope that it would impress the importunate Tyler and lead to a small advance of cash. Indeed, there is still in existence the back of an envelope which served as ledger wherein were noted the sums, amounting in all to more than \$1200, that were doled out to O. Henry to keep his spirits up and in the faint hope that he might actually get around some day to writing that comedy.

The stories O. Henry wrote, their abundance, and their spasmodic unevenness can never be understood by one who does not keep in mind the fact that he was chronically penniless and forever dashing off pieces either to quiet some editor who had lent him money or to extract himself from pawn at some hotel. This continuous

pauperism is usually explained in one of two ways, either that he tossed largesse right and left like some latter-day Robin Hood or that his pockets were continuously drained by blackmailers whose silence was necessary to his peace. But really no explanation is urgent, for O. Henry earned comparatively little money even in his most successful years, and the great sums which his works eventually brought did not begin to stream in until after his death.

It was from such a fellow that Tyler received at last the somewhat cloudy scenario of a comedy to be based on "The World and the Door," a story which appears now as the first one in the posthumous collection called "Whirligigs." That story has as its setting one of those little lazy colonies of expatriates in South America—the wistful colonies of which every member has a good legal reason for not returning to the United States. O. Henry had seen them at close range in the unhappy days when he and the Jennings brothers were themselves fugitives from justice. "The World and the Door" spins a romance between a New Yorker, who had shot down a fellow-roisterer in a drunken brawl, and a lovely woman, who had given aconite to her husband

and left hurriedly for foreign parts. The tale reaches its acute crisis when the two fugitives discover that neither victim died and that both of them are free to abandon romance and return to civilization. From that story the scenario was made and set aside to simmer.

Then one Sunday morning, at a time when H. B. Warner, a Tyler star, was involved in a moribund entertainment that was sinking rapidly out in Chicago, in walked Tyler's father all aglow over a new volume of O. Henry stories. It contained the yarn which every one knows as "A Retrieved Reformation." I find out when from time to time polls are solemnly opened to decide which was the best of all he wrote, the vote goes either to that fragment, so Dickensy in its flavor, "An Unfinished Story," or to that rarer and more delicate work, "A Municipal Report." (My own choice would always be for "The Skylight Room.") But I suppose there is no doubt that "A Retrieved Reformation" is the most widely known of all the tales O. Henry told. It is the story of *Jimmy Valentine*, ex-convict and retired safe cracker, who, having reformed and settled down as a bank cashier, has so artfully builded his alias that the pursuing detective cannot prove

his identity. Just in the moment when this avenger is turning away, baffled, panic word is rushed in that a child has been locked by accident in the bank's new vault, a child sure to die of suffocation unless, by some miracle, there can be found in time one of the half-dozen men in the world so expert in safe cracking that, with eyes blindfolded and fingers sensitized, they can decipher any combination. Of course the heroic *Valentine* must volunteer his buried talent and, by his success at it, confess the suspected identity. And of course, since O. Henry was a spinner of fairy-tales, the detective does not laugh cynically and arrest the lad, but bursts, instead, into affecting tears and goes pensively away forever.

Tyler read that story, shut the book with a snap, and began telegraphing hotly in every direction. Out in Chicago was Warner needing a new play as a drooping flower needs water. One message went to O. Henry, offering \$500 for the dramatic rights. The offer was accepted with pathetic promptitude, first by wire and then by the following letter:

Asheville, N. C., October 23, 1909.

Mr. George C. Tyler,
Liebler & Co.,
N. Y. City.

My dear Mr. Tyler: I hereby transfer to you the entire dramatic rights of the story you write me about—the title is “A Retrieved Reformation.” I am glad to be able to hand you over anything that you might be able to use.

But I want you to let the \$500 that I owe you still remain owing, for I am going to write that play yet and soon. I’ve been in bad shape for a long time, both as to writing and refunding. I’m wrestling with a bad case of neurasthenia (so the doctor says), but I’m getting back into good shape again. I am living about six miles out of Asheville and spend most of the time climbing hills and living out of doors. I have knocked off twenty pounds weight. I eat like a drayman and don’t know what booze tastes like. In fact, I’ll be better than ever in another week or two.

I got out the scenario of “The World and the Door” some days ago and began to plan out the acts and scenes. I’ll surprise you with it as soon as I get down to hard work.

I deeply appreciate your leniency and kindness and intend to “come up to scratch” yet with the goods.

So the dramatic rights of the “Retrieved Reformation” are yours and if you strike another story you like take it too.

In the meantime, I owe you \$500, and am going to pay it and remain

Sincerely yours,

SYDNEY PORTER.

P. S. If you want a more formal assignment of the rights of the story, send on the papers and I will sign ‘em.

Tyler then sent for Paul Armstrong, a wise old artisan of the theater, who could be counted on to turn the story into a play without spilling anything, and who could also be expected to do it quickly, as he too was probably without funds. Armstrong read the story, agreed to try his hand at it, and vanished. It turned out later that he had been locked up in a room at the Hotel Algonquin, but for a week there was no signal from him and it was upon an impresario fuming with impatience and uneasiness that he sauntered nonchalantly in at the end of that week. Tyler launched at once on a burning speech in which he gave his opinion of Broadway as a habitat for men that thought they were playwrights, his opinion of the faithless and the irresponsible denizens of that territory, and his opinion of his own bitter and thankless job, which, he said, he was minded to forsake, then and there, in favor of farming. Which oration Armstrong interrupted by producing from his ulster the completed four-act manuscript of a melodrama, the first of the crook plays, "Alias Jimmy Valentine." The next day they were all on their way to Chicago, and eleven days later the piece was produced there. Within three weeks, therefore, from Tyler's first reading

24 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

of "A Retrieved Reformation" its dramatization began a run which was to make reputations for some people and fortunes for others, which was to tweak and tantalize playgoers all over America, England, France, Spain, and South Africa, and which was to breed a very epidemic of plays in which no self-respecting protagonist would think of approaching the first act without a neat murder or at least a bank robbery to his credit.

I often think how much it adds to a playgoer's interest in a piece to know something of how it came to be written, something of the source of its incident and its point of view, something, that is, of its own biography. Consider those first-nighters in Chicago who encountered *Jimmy Valentine* in the Sing Sing scene, met with him the sorry procession of prison types, and finally followed him in his precarious flight into respectability. How they would have gaped had they known (and probably not more than one or two of them even guessed) that this, in a sense, was O. Henry's own story, that he too had been a convicted felon, that he had come to know the original of *Jimmy Valentine* when they were both in prison together down in Texas—and that at that very time, he, like *Jimmy*, was building with his own hands a new identity in a new world!

If this missing chapter ever does find its way into the O. Henry biography, there ought, I suppose, to be a foot-note about the actress picked up out of space to play the leading feminine rôle. For "Alias Jimmy Valentine," that company of Warner's out in Chicago would do well enough; but in addition to the play, the demands of its cast also required a new leading woman. Some one mentioned casually that there was a promising new-comer to be seen that very afternoon in a special *matinée* somewhere on Broadway. Tyler dropped in, took one look, and engaged her forthwith—a lovely, droll, wide-eyed young actress who had just come in out of the provinces and who was already foot-sore from her weary rounds of the managers' offices in an effort to persuade some one that she knew how to act. Her name was Laurette Taylor.

But that *is* a foot-note. And "Alias Jimmy Valentine" itself is important in the story of O. Henry as a playwright only because it yielded Paul Armstrong something like \$100,000, while it yielded O. Henry, whose idea it had been, nothing like that at all. He made just \$500 out of it. This painful discrepancy was something which the guileful Tyler meant that O. Henry should not be allowed to forget. Every week,

when the official copy of the box-office statement went through the mails to Armstrong as a matter of routine, a duplicate copy was mailed to O. Henry. It was, of course, a lean time in which Armstrong did not receive each week more for writing the play than O. Henry received all told for having invented it. After a little succession of such weekly reminders, the wear and tear upon O. Henry's spirits became visible.

Witness this letter which arrived in New York early in 1910:

Asheville, N. C.
Monday.

My dear Mr. Tyler,

I had expected to be in New York before this but I am not. I have been putting in all my time getting in good shape for future campaigns, and doing practically no work at all. Have entirely recovered my health and feel fine and fit. I have done barely enough writing to keep the possum from the door since I've been down here, but I think I have gained greatly thereby.

Got a little proposition to make to you.

If you'll advance me \$500, I'll come at once to N. Y., establish myself in some quiet rural spot of the metropolis known only to yourself and your emissaries and get to work and finish a play. I will not let my whereabouts or even the fact that I am in the city be known to any one but you; and I will give all my time and energy to the play.

As collateral, I can only make over to you the dramatic rights of all my stories until the work is done.

BEHIND THE SCENES

27

The new play "Alias J. V." has inspired me to believe I can do something for both of us.

If you will do this, let me know immediately and I will come.

Of course if you don't care to do it, it won't affect our future relations. But I want to get in the game, and I'll stick to you *exclusively* until we try it out.

Yours as ever,

SYDNEY PORTER.

c/o Jas. S. Coleman.

The answer to this seems to have been cautious and conditional, for further explanation soon started north, as follows:

Asheville, N. C. 1/25 '10

My dear Mr. Tyler:

I will be brief. Why I want the money in a lump sum is to make a getaway quick. Your proposition is better than mine, but it lacks the hastiness and expedition necessary to a big theatrical success. As I told you I have been busy down here for about four months getting rid of cirrhosis of the liver, fatty degeneration of the heart and neurasthenia—none of which troubles I have ever had. But I was about as nervous and reflexactiony as the hind-leg of a frog as shown in the magazine-section of almost any Sunday newspaper. The country and the mountains have been worth more to me than money—I am almost as strong and tough as a suffragette.

But I have (by order of the Old Doctor) avoided work gladly and cheerfully. Consequently I have about as much money on hand as was left lying around the box-office at the last performance of "Lo."

Now, suppose we have a few moments' conversation

28 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

as heart-to-heart as an editorial on chicken-salad in the Ladies Home Journal by Edward Everett Hale.

I owe something in the neighborhood of \$500 down here that should and shall be paid before the obsequious porter of the So. Ry. Co. can have the opportunity of brushing the soot off the window sill of Mr. Pullman's car onto the left knee of my new trousers. I'm not after money now—it's transportation, transportation and a chance that I want. I can work the proposition out in the short story line: but it's slow, Colonel, slow. I want to get into the real game, and I'll stake my reputation as the best short story writer within a radius of Asheville that we can pull it off.

Here's what I need in order to start things going.

I've got to pay up everything here and leave a small bunch of collateral with my long-suffering family to enable them to purchase the usual cuisine of persimmons and rabbits for a while.

I will do this.

If you will send me the necessary sinews, I will start for N. Y. on Wednesday or Thursday of next week. I will, on arrival, secure a room or two with privilege of bath 3 flights above, and phone you the next morning. Thenceforth I am yours and Mr. Ford's until results have been accomplished. I will place all my time at your disposal until the play is finished. My proposition is not unselfish—I expect to make it profitable to myself as well as to you.

Proviso—

Don't give it away to any magazine, or anybody else, that I am there. I will be in retirement and working for you as long as may be necessary. My mail will be sent here as it has been, and forwarded there. My family will remain here during the summer. . . . They seem to like the idea of my returning to N. Y., although I have been reasonably kind to them.

Now, listen.

You know how much "front" counts. I'm not afraid of N. Y. police or editors: but if I arrive there in a linen suit, with helmet and tennis shoes, what would Big Bill Edwards do to me but shovel me into a cart and dump me into the East River?

So get busy with your telegraph blanks. Send me \$750 *by wire* when you get this and I'll strike N. Y. Thursday at the latest. I've got to have some margin, and you'll get my exclusive services thereby. Take another chance. You can't lose.

I am enclosing as a rather poor collateral the rights to my stories.

I hate to make any new dickers with the magazine people and that's why I put the matter so strenuously up to you. I know now how much better (financially) the stage business is:—thanks to you.

Tell Oom Paul Armstrong that I hope he'll crack the safe for all it's worth in "Alias Jimmy." I got the press notices that you had sent me.

I'm awfully sorry to have to come back to town and write a better play than Mr. Armstrong has—but I need the money—he won't mind.

With best regards,

SYDNEY PORTER.

c/o Jas. S. Coleman.

P. S. To summarize—\$750—by wire—not by an A. D. T.—satisfaction guaranteed or money refunded.

This appears to have been followed breathlessly by a telegram which read thus:

Like to have funds. Do wire to-day. Will positively be there on time. Have cut out spending and Chianti.
S. P.

30 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

Tyler seems to have thought it wisest to send only a part of the sum demanded and to do that by mail. By the end of February this glowing message came up from Asheville:

Will arrive at noon Monday if four hundred wired to-day. Exclusive work guaranteed until satisfactory results.

SYDNEY PORTER.

And this was followed by one even more urgent:

Wire balance. Am waiting at the depot.

PORTER.

So Tyler wired the balance, but the promised telephone message from the modest and secluded lodgings never came. The first tidings came from a hospital, to which O. Henry had been taken mortally ill with pneumonia. He had received the money, retained the margin, and started north. But once he had found himself at the gates of Bagdad, he had stood wide-eyed for a moment and then drifted happily off among the bazaars, stumbled on some old cronies, and given himself over to celebration of his return from exile. Tyler never saw him again. And the great American play—"The World and the Door," a comedy

in three acts by the author of "The Four Million"
—was never written.

3

THE SHADOW ON A GREAT SUCCESS

WHEN "Enter Madame" slipped quietly into New York in 1920 and established itself overnight as one of the triumphant plays of a none-too-happy season, and Gilda Varesi, who wrote it and played in it, awoke next morning to find herself rather more famous than she had dared to dream, there were few among all those rejoicing with her who saw the shadow which fell across this shining success. It was the shadow that is known as "Too late." The success itself was incontestable, but it could not be shared by the Madame Varesi about whom, and, in a sense, for whom, the play was written.

"Enter Madame" is a comedy of temperament, a humorous, affectionate study of the tantrums and tenderness of a famous prima donna, such a baffling and enchanting first lady of the opera as Elena Varesi, whose sweet voice and overwhelming charm made her so great a favorite in Rome and Berlin and London in the eighties. Of such stock comes this daughter of hers, this Gilda Va-

resi. Her most vivid memories of her mother are of a radiant lady who, when her engagements permitted and she happened to think of it, used occasionally to sweep down on startled Milan, where her two daughters were left in the care of a formidable nurse. There would be a shower of gifts and endearments and enough maternal solicitude to last all year crowded tempestuously into a few exciting days. Then the great lady would go coursing on her way, perhaps to take the baths at Aix-les-Bains, perhaps to descend on London for a dazzling engagement at Covent Garden.

It is with just such a whirlwind domestic interlude that the new comedy deals. The play deals with madame's brief visit home, a lull between engagements in Spain and South America which she devotes to routing from her lonesome husband's mind all thought of taking a duller but more comfortable wife to his bosom. He had sworn he was done forever with this trapezing around the world in her train, but the last you see of him he is starting dutifully for Buenos Aires and carrying her dog to boot. The last line of the play, delivered with a flourish, is, "Exit Madame."

That Gilda Varesi did not grow up to grace

some provincial stock company in her native Italy is due to the fact that Madame Varesi lost her voice in a severe illness and, with the idea of burying herself as far as possible from the tormenting scenes of her former glory, migrated to a place of which she had heard vaguely and which seemed to have a sort of Italian name. This was Chicago.

There she managed to get along somehow by teaching singing and, if there was not always enough to provide the children with fit clothes for school, there was certainly enough for an occasional reception and salon when such peers as Melba passed by and revived Madame Varesi's memories.

Gilda, the ugly duckling of the family, was a considerable trial to her mother because she insisted on going on the stage. Madame Varesi knew what heartaches it could involve, and besides it is just possible that she doubted inwardly whether the aspirant could make such a mark in the theater as would be expected—by her—of a Varesi.

This fear was only confirmed at the meeting she finally consented to arrange between her daughter and the great Modjeska, who in her declining

years (she must have been nearly seventy then)' was still touring successfully and inexpensively in classical repertoire. For this meeting the youngest of the Varesis had prepared herself by learning the speeches of *Desdemona* and shouting them out in the woods to the considerable agitation of the local fauna.

The meeting was tense, the famous star listening majestically while the neophyte poured out a cataract of Venetian woe. The decision, when finally given, was impromptu, but fraught with significance.

"Gilda will be an emotional actress," she said. (At this point Madame Varesi dissolved in tears because emotional actresses suffer so.) "But," she went on bitterly, "she will not be a success. She is thin, homely, and an artist. On all three counts, they will not want her in the American theater."

Then followed the promise of a place in Modjeska's company, after a brief practice engagement with the Ben Greet players, with whom she played everything from *Jessica* in "The Merchant" and *Maria* in "Twelfth Night" to the mob in "Julius Cæsar," playing the mob with such transalpine ardor that *Mark Antony* made a formal complaint against the mob's sitting on poor *Cæsar's* corpse.

Meanwhile, Madame Varesi herself tried to instil a few principles. There is something deeply pathetic in the picture of the exiled prima donna, now old and stout, enlivening those Chicago lodgings with an effort to reproduce for her wide-eyed daughter the gesture and passion of some forgotten triumph in far-off Covent Garden.

The first season with Modjeska—it was Modjeska's last season on the stage—was eventful. Once the star fell and broke her arm and the management made a thrifty effort to keep the tour going with the novice in the rôle of *Lady Macbeth*. The novice did so well that Modjeska promptly installed her as *Elizabeth* in "Mary Stuart"—the German Schiller's tragedy given with an Italian and Polish actress, each playing in English with an accent that could be heard for miles. Yet it must have been worth seeing, at that.

It was fresh from such experiences that Gilda Varesi went to Mrs. Fiske for "Salvation Nell" and, in two seasons, learned more from her than most players learn anywhere.

There followed many minor rôles, and ever and always the dailies and weeklies of England and America gave a word or so of critical enthusiasm for Varesi—for her fine work both here and abroad

36 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

as the old opera singer in "Romance," for her astonishing performance as the mad woman in "Children of Earth," for her unforgettable rage as the blind creature in the dungeon scene of "The Jest." Oh, there were plenty of plaudits. But always her rôles were minor rôles. Secretly, Madame Varesi out in Chicago must have felt that the mere plaudits were not enough for one whose great-grandmother had been the adored Luigia Boccabadotti at the opera in Rome when Napoleon was lord of Europe, whose grandfather had been the Felice Varesi for whom "Rigoletto" was written, and whose mother had had more than a little hour of triumph in the great capitals back home.

Then, into the producing field in New York came a new manager, Brock Pemberton, who decided to make his début with this comedy, "Enter Madame," which, in desperation, Varesi had written for herself in collaboration with Mrs. Donn Byrne. The play had been kicking around the managers' offices for many months without any of them reaching the point of willingness to produce it.

Attendant upon its first performance were all the circumstances which the wiseacres of Broadway regard as certain forerunners of failure.

Here was a new and inexperienced producer. They always fail, said Broadway. Then he had been obliged to content himself with the Garrick, a theater so far outside the familiar belt that the wiseacres said no one would go near it. The play opened without the advantage of an out-of-town try-out on a night so torrid that existence in New York was no more than barely endurable. At eight o'clock, just at the hour calculated to discourage all theater-goers, the heavens opened and sluiced the city. The leading man had entered the rehearsals so late that his knowledge of the text was maddeningly vague and he had to be prompted throughout an agonizing evening.

Yet "Enter Madame" succeeded. From the first night, its theater did not know a vacant seat in twenty-six weeks. Within a few weeks many more central playhouses were ogling it and offering blandishments. Ticket agencies were agreeing to buy all its orchestra seats for six weeks in advance. London theaters were cabling invitations to visit Piccadilly and the Strand. It was an immense success.

And the shadow? Well, "Enter Madame" was produced in mid-August. Madame Varesi had died in June.

The casual mention of how Varesi came to play

Lady Macbeth before she was twenty-one is a reminder that whereas no managers ever cast her for important rôles, chance did occasionally. Or was it chance?

Usually the lot of an understudy in the American theater, is a cheerless one. There is a strong tradition which forces the sickest actor upon the stage when the voice of the call-boy is heard. It is only in fiction that an understudy steps into a rôle at the last minute and awakes next morning to find himself in capital letters.

Yet, somehow, Varesi did pretty well. The giving of any other player's rôle to her to study in case of an emergency has had a singularly debilitating effect on the actress thus doomed to be displaced. Not Modjeska alone but all the others have given way under the strain. Thus Doris Keane in London, when "Romance" was enjoying its interminable war-time run there, lived to experience the sensation of reading in her own sick-bed the glowing English criticisms of her understudy's performance in the leading rôle of that Sheldon triumph.

Only Mrs. Fiske resisted to the last, but when, in "Salvation Nell," she had to go through her part with this flaming Italian woman standing in

the wings, all made up to go on as *Nell* if need be, and fairly radiating the will to play, even she tottered. She felt within her a stronger impulse to go on sick-report than she had known in all her days on the stage. Hastily she arranged for Varesi to understudy another part. "May it be that of the harlot?" asked the aspirant wistfully. Mrs. Fiske smiled maternally. "With your figure, my dear?" she replied, and bade the young hopeful make ready to substitute in case anything should befall the gaunt woman playing *Hallelujah Mary*. A few days later *Hallelujah Mary* broke an obliging rib. Small wonder then that, in so superstitious a world as the theater, word soon spread that Varesi had brought over from Italy the power of the evil eye—a rumor which gained considerable credence once upon a time when, in the middle of a sensationally successful run, a great star announced the intention of departing for other climes on a matter of private business. The management immediately put Varesi into rehearsal as a substitute. She was in the midst of elated preparation for the rôle, which, after the succession of old peasant parts, would suffer her to speak at last without an accent and to reveal what beauty of body was hers. In the midst of

all this, the star suddenly decided not to quit. They say Varesi went calmly to the great one's dressing-room, looked the offender over from head to toe, and said in a voice of doom (no matter how much she may have been smiling inwardly), "I was promised this part, and if I do not get the chance to play it I will poison you."

Whereat there were gales of laughter up and down Broadway—laughter suddenly and nervously stilled when, a fortnight later, the star was borne away for a week of serious illness. The doctors seemed to think it was influenza. Maybe it was. The star was John Barrymore. The play was "The Jest." Varesi had sustained her reputation as the most destructive understudy in the American Theater.

But that was in the days of struggle. Since then Varesi has starred in New York and Chicago and London and her glowering days are over.

II

THE KNOCK AT THE STAGE-DOOR

I

"BORN OF STROLLING PLAYERS"

ALL about us in the theater to-day are the players who will be the Mrs. Fiskes, the Julia Marlowes, the Laurette Taylors of to-morrow—the young fry of the stage whose names will be big and black in the playbills of 1935 and 1940. Of these youngsters, none is lovelier, none has a richer or more glowing talent, none seems more surely possessed of a little of an ancient magic than the one named Margalo Gillmore, a fair-haired, sunlit girl who, unheralded and decently abashed, emerged out of obscurity in our theater a few seasons ago. When, among the first of her adventures, she caught all our eyes as the daughter of the famous *Mrs. Fair*, those of us who

had seen the John Drew plays of the early nineties experienced a little twinge of recollection, recalling the gangling and stringy but marvelously sweet girl who, just as shy and just as awkward, ventured forth then under the shelter of a celebrated uncle. Now we nodded our heads and whispered one to another, "She is like a new Ethel Barrymore."

But what few of us knew (though all of us might have guessed) was that she was like Ethel Barrymore in another respect. She was like Ethel Barrymore in respect to her grandmother. They are both children of the theater, each, as a matter of fact, born in the fourth generation of a celebrated theatrical family. As Ethel Barrymore is the granddaughter of the famous Mrs. John Drew, so Margalo Gillmore is the granddaughter of the famous Emily Thorne, who was a favorite in London in the eighties. We might, I say, have guessed as much. Indeed, after watching the exits and the entrances of a dozen seasons in New York, one is minded, when the young pretenders write down from Poughkeepsie and Northampton explaining that they will be free for all sorts of careers in June and asking how to go on the stage—one is minded, then, to answer in this wise:

THE KNOCK AT THE STAGE-DOOR 43

My dear young lady,

There are many ways in which you might prepare yourself for the theater, but one thing is essential. You may do as you think best about selecting an experienced actress for your teacher but you *must* select an experienced actress for your grandmother.

Such a reply might be dispiriting in its effect, but there is wisdom in it. It says something about the theater that is true and significant—something which, twenty-five or fifty years ago, would have gone without saying, for the theater then was still thought of as a world apart, a strange place where a black art was practised by a Gipsy folk, bred to it, doubtless through generations, though of course one did not pretend to know enough about such people to say with any certainty.

Even to the end of the nineteenth century, this notion of the theater as a world apart persisted. It may be a long while ago that the laws of England classified actors along with rogues and vagabonds and the churches there forbade them burial in consecrated ground. It may be a long while ago that the first actresses to venture before an English audience—French hussies, they were—were hooted and pelted and generally treated in a manner so discouraging that it was clear, according to the delighted Puritan diarists of the

44 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

day, that so unfeminine and offensive an exploit would never be repeated.

But it is not so very long ago that the Church of the Transfiguration in New York earned its cozy and hospitable name of the Little Church Around the Corner when it opened its doors to the burial service of an actor after a more haughty House of God on near-by Fifth Avenue had declined the opportunity. And it is not so very long ago that many of the more righteous among our preachers, when busy in exorcising the evil spirits from their communities, were rather given to using the word "actress" and the word "harlot" as interchangeable terms—both opprobrious.

It is only recently that this attitude (still visible enough, of course, in some quarters) has begun to take on a slightly archeological aspect. Indeed, the pendulum has moved far in the last twenty-five years—swinging from the day when it was assumed that no decent woman would appear on the stage to the vague liberalism of the present day, when it is apparently assumed that *any* decent woman can. In such a day, it is worth while pointing out that there is no art in which the force of heredity seems to play so controlling a part. To the young pretenders (by way of giv-

THE KNOCK AT THE STAGE-DOOR 45

ing them pause, perhaps, or at least of instilling in them a little decent humility toward the house at whose doors they are knocking) it is worth while pointing out that the theater has an aristocracy older and more deeply rooted than that which any other activity in American life can boast. The banker or the woolen merchant or the pedagogue who can say that his father and grandfather were bankers or woolen merchants or pedagogues before him, feels so great a strength and continuity in the fabric of that life that he fairly glistens with pride and a sense of well-being and security. But compared with the foremost actors of our stage, these tradesmen and philosophers are the merest parvenus.

Of this impression that the talents of the theater are husbanded through the years, handed down from father to son, from mother to daughter, the annals of the American stage furnish repeated reminders and reinforcements. Such reminders come at odd times and in odd ways. Go into the Players' Club, standing there on the south side of Gramercy Park, smoky, unpretentious, and (for New York) quite thick with memories. There they will point out to you with a certain unfathomable satisfaction that the club, in all its years,

has had but three presidents. The names of the three are written on the walls—Edwin Booth, Joseph Jefferson, John Drew. But what they do not point out, probably because they think of it as a matter of course, is that each of these men, in his fleeting eminence, was no *nouveau riche* of the theater but one born in its purple, one trained to its speech from the cradle, one bred of show folks.

The name of Booth has been in our playbills for more than a century. It is still there. The Jeffersons were of even older lineage, and time was when a performance of "The Rivals" was managed in this country with every rôle played by one or another of the Jefferson clan. And Drew, of course, stands midway, the grandson of a popular English actor, the son of a superb *comédienne*, the uncle of the three Barrymores.

I watched his enigmatic smile off and on through that uncomfortable evening when two of these children of his sister were lending their potent name to a spurious play called "Clair de Lune," a sleazy and pompous dramatization of Hugo's "L'Homme Qui Rit." It worked itself up by easy stages to one scabrous scene wherein a degenerate duchess made hot love to the hideous

THE KNOCK AT THE STAGE-DOOR 47

cripple with the mangled face, the part played, of course, by John Barrymore. That rôle of the duchess seemed the most tempting in all the list of characters, and at first one wondered a little why Ethel Barrymore had passed it by and taken for herself the less palpitant part of the queen. But, after the love scene, the reason was clear enough. "Ethel could hardly have played the duchess," said another actress, acidly. "It would have been adding incest to injury." However, that is a digression.

Consider, instead, who *did* play the duchess. The part fell, by this default, to the slender, deft, uncanny hands of Violet Kemble-Cooper. Now, if it be true that on our great occasions the spirits of our forebears gather round us, to brood over us, to wish us well, and to watch what, of all they knew and handed on, we have remembered and kept bright—if that legend be true, what a throng of ghosts must have hovered in the wings at the Empire that night. For playing opposite to heir-apparent of the Drew-Barrymore tradition was a young actress of an even more illustrious inheritance. Maurice Barrymore was there in the wings, of course—the handsome Barry who fluttered a thousand hearts in the days of the bustle and the

redowa and the phaeton. And, of course, there was old Mrs. Drew, pounding her disapproval, I should think, with the now inaudible cane of *Mrs. Malaprop*. But there, too, was Fanny Kemble and John Philip Kemble and a score of other memories of Drury Lane and Covent Garden, awake in those wings because two heirs of theirs were out on the stage before an audience playing a love scene.

In writing of heredity, the word "environment" pops up as quickly and as inevitably as does the far end of a seesaw when, with firmness and conviction, you but plant yourself on the other. It is difficult always to say of any player that he was born with his talent, since, just because he *was* born in the theater, he wandered early upon the stage and so was bent and shaped to its needs while he was young. One does not have to be a profound student of the stage to see the tremendous advantage that is held on it by those who begin their work there so early in life that they are as unaware of it as of the air they breathe and of the sun that warms us all. They are growing up in the theater in the precious years when the rest of us are outside, not only not learning how to act, but, by every experience and precept and

THE KNOCK AT THE STAGE-DOOR 49

taboo of the breakfast table and the sidewalk and the schoolyard, are busily learning not to act at all.

Consider for a moment the most beautiful art which the theater of our time has known—the incomparable art of Eleanora Duse. Her biographical note in "Who's Who in the Theatre" starts off with the single, significant line: "Born of strolling players." Are we to find the explanation of her art in that fact? Or is there no need to go back of the mere fact that she went on the stage as a baby—so young that by the time she was seven she was experienced enough to take over the post of prompter and by the time she was sixteen she had had enough training to play the foremost rôles, enough, at least, to play *Juliet* in a production at Verona. Sixteen and playing *Juliet* at Verona! The next Vassar girl who writes down in April to Mr. Belasco that every one is so good as to call her pretty and that they did all admit she was perfectly splendid as *Tweenie* in "The Admirable Crichton" at Prom time and that she is only twenty-one and please would he take her under his instruction and make a star of her some day—such a one might well receive back from him just a little engraved card with this legend

on it: "When she was sixteen, Duse played *Juliet* at Verona!"

That biographical note of hers, so rare in its bluntness among the more pretentious paragraphs which are carefully and sometimes cryptically edited to adorn such records, might, as a matter of fact, be written after most of our best names in the theater. Minnie Maddern Fiske, E. H. Sothern, Maude Adams—born of showfolks all and born while those folks were on tour. That was why it was possible for Maude Adams to make her first appearance on the stage at the age of nine months—her first entrance was on a platter—and why, when little Minnie Maddern made her New York début at the age of four, it was as an actress who, though the advertisements at the time mendaciously announced it as her first appearance on any stage, had already played a dozen rôles in as many towns and simply reeked of experience.

And lest it should seem from this review of the generations in respect to our players that it is only among them that this inheritance is marked, it should be noted that the same tradition can be observed at work among the others arts of the theater. It is, therefore, worth mentioning par-

THE KNOCK AT THE STAGE-DOOR 51

enthetically that the two best plays written by Americans in our time—"The First Year" and some one of Eugene O'Neill's—were the work of playwrights born of showfolks, the work of children of the theater born on tour. And for those enthusiasts in matters of decoration, who seem to feel that the actors and the playwrights are but negligible and rather annoying functionaries and that the true man of the theater is he who dreams its scenes and brings them into being in a new beauty of line and light and color, it must be noted that their leader, too, was born on tour. This Edward Gordon Craig, before whom even George Jean Nathan crosses himself in public and who was for so long a mere voice crying in the wilderness, not only had an actress for a daughter but an actress for a grandmother. It was out of the orthodox theater of canvas palaces, flat flights of stairs, and no end of grand draperies that Craig went out to preach the new gospel. His mother, by the way, has also been a good actress. Her name is Ellen Terry.

There is a story in some old showman's memoirs of a visit paid back-stage in the late sixties, when Tom Davey and Lizzie Maddern managed the stock company out in Columbus. The visitor was

all for a little idle gossip and sat down for his comfort on the nearest costume-hamper which had been pushed against the dressing-room wall. Whereat Davey roared with alarm and dragged him off exclaiming: "Here, don't sit there or you'll be smothering America's future tragedienne before she has had a chance." And he lifted the cover far enough to show that that basket was serving as temporary cradle for a red-headed baby named Marie Augusta Davey, who was destined, in time, to get out of the basket and, after a necessary and proper interval, to become Mrs. Fiske.

Such tales as that one have in them the tingle of the eternal renewal of the theater, the same tingle I felt one hot night in the summer of 1916 when I was watching some children in a settlement house on Avenue B, New York, perform with tremendous gravity the "Sherwood Forest" of Alfred Noyes. The boy who played *Robin Hood* was a striking, swarthy, unexpectedly deep-voiced youngster who was later snuffed out in the war. The sight of his name in the program had a little thrill in it for those of us who were out front. It was Richard Mansfield, 2nd.

So, when, from time to time, I hear a mighty sighing in the land over the fact that we have no

THE KNOCK AT THE STAGE-DOOR 53

great players any more, I manage to bear up because of my own suspicion that the next Ada Rehan is asleep to-night in a costume-hamper in some obscure theater. And I think that, after all, we might better write to that girl in Poughkeepsie something in this wise:

My dear child:

Come if you must. You will find your way in the theater full of the most heart-breaking discouragements and, even if you are not to be driven out of it, it is probable that the great rôles will never come your way. But you will have a daughter some day and the way will be easier for her. As for your granddaughter—why, she may play *Juliet* in Verona.

2

THE SWARMING AMATEURS

Amateur activity in dramatic work has in the last ten or fifteen years increased to a most astonishing degree. The American theater, still directed however helplessly from New York, has fallen ludicrously behind in its task of keeping apace with the expansion of the country and, from many a thriving community, has retreated altogether, leaving the citizens to darkness and the

54 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

movies. In such places, amateur societies of staggering ambitiousness have sprung up to satisfy an ancient and, for all the Puritan hostility, an ineradicable appetite.

There has been an entirely new interest in stage decoration, so that one can mention cycloramas and amber spots without causing bewilderment. There has been a great reading and conning of new plays. Publishers who, in 1910, would have fainted at the mere suggestion that they publish a play have since taken to putting out contemporary dramatic literature in abundance. The works of Eugene O'Neill, for instance, few of which have found the professional stages outside New York, have, in book form, penetrated to the remotest nooks of America, and his name, probably, has more meaning in its generation—conveys more, that is, to more people—than the incomparably more successful Clyde Fitch's did in his.

It is the same with the aspiring Susan Glaspell. Her plays have had only brief and experimental production in New York, but they have been published, and the amateurs from Savannah to Seattle have reveled in them. She herself could not come anywhere near telling how many performances have been given in America of "Suppressed

THE KNOCK AT THE STAGE-DOOR 55

Desires" and "Trifles," for most often, probably, no report of such performance is made either to her or to her publisher. The old aversion to paying royalties is still strong among the amateurs. Fairly reputable characters in the community—the banker, the pastor, and all—have not yet learned to blush at picking a playwright's pocket.

I suppose "Suppressed Desires" has been played oftener in America than any other one-act play. I once saw it creditably given by a college dramatic club at commencement time before an alumni audience. The performance was amusing to watch but not so amusing as the audience. That audience, drawn from every State in the Union, followed the players with a reminiscent glint in the eye and with moving lips. They were all sorts and conditions of men and women—architects, insurance agents, teachers, and the like. Indeed, I think they had only three things in common. They all derived directly or indirectly from this college, they all believed in the sanctity of private property, and they all, at one time or another, had played in "Suppressed Desires."

It is from such clubs, in and out of the schools and colleges, that there have sprung the number

of young men and women who think of New York chiefly as the city where one can go and sort of loiter around the stage-door of the Belasco Theater in the chance that the Wizard, on his way out to luncheon (hatless and clad, of course, in a gray-green artist's smock), will see one, be struck instantly by one's dramatic talent, and engage one forthwith for his next production.

By definition, an amateur is one who does a thing for the love of it, but, naturally enough and pardonably, the people of the theater are wont to speak of an amateur as one who does everything incompetently. They forget that there are many players in the Amateur Comedy Club of New York who have played more rôles in the last fifteen years than most of their little brothers of the real pear-tree garden. And that some of their productions are immeasurably superior in every way to the productions of the same pieces made outside on Broadway. They forget that the Washington Square Players, a group of quasi-amateurs, constituted the cocoon from which, after several years' hatching, emerged the Theater Guild—which was, in two or three seasons, to be recognized as the most important theater in the English-speaking world.

THE KNOCK AT THE STAGE-DOOR 57

But the Washington Square Players were not entirely amateur, and the Amateur Comedy Club is a dazzling exception. All in all, the attitude of the professional players toward the amateurs is best summed up in a raffish story they delight in telling on all occasions. It begins with a touching picture of an old broken-down tragedian sharing a park bench with a bedraggled and unappetizing street-walker. "Ah, Madame," says the tragedian, "*quelle Ironie!* The two oldest professions in the world—ruined by amateurs."

3

DR. GUNDELFINGER

It is not, however, the amateur actor who afflicts the theater. The amateur at whose activity the theater manifests all the symptoms of chills and fever is the amateur playwright. And this, I think, is true, that men who would never think of attempting a novel or an ode or even a book of essays are not one whit abashed at the prospect of writing a four-act problem play.

The number of these unheard dramatic authors would exceed your most extravagant estimates.

A house-to-house search of the bureau drawers of Manhattan's hall bedrooms would, I am sure, yield up a hundred thousand disembodied manuscripts. The most unexpected persons carry plays concealed about their persons. One indignant old English dramatist swears that, once upon a time when he was ill, the surgeon called to his bedside told him he had only two hours to live and said that there would be just time for him to read a little comedy which he, the surgeon, had dashed off some time before. The fairly reliable Channing Pollock swears that a man once brought to his New York office the manuscript of a five-act melodrama which he had tenderly carried down from his home in Rochester. While evasively agreeing to read and pass judgment on this work, Pollock asked the author why he had not been content to send it down by registered mail. "Oh, well," was the reply, "it was no bother to bring it down. I come down every day. I'm a conductor on the New York Central." I myself, for several years, received at regular intervals a scenario from one man who always offered me 50 per cent. of the prospective royalties if I would get him a contract for his play's production. These scenarios varied wildly in subject-matter and

THE KNOCK AT THE STAGE-DOOR 59

style, but they had this in common—that they were all mailed from the same place, the Matteawan State Hospital for the Insane.

Louis N. Parker, the author of "Rosemary" and "Pomander Walk" and "Disraeli," in a privately printed account of some of his more painful experiences in the theater, reports on one submitted manuscript in the following words:

It was a five-act tragedy, and with liberal allowance for intervals for much-needed refreshment, it would have played nearly an hour. The first act represented the utterly dark interior of a cavern in the heart of the Caucasus. It was, very superfluously, night. There was to be deep silence during the first five minutes after the curtain had risen. Then a voice, proceeding from an unseen speaker at the back of the cavern, began. And continued. It gave us an agonizing history of the speaker's sufferings. It went on for ten minutes and ended, as nearly as I can remember: "And must I, the last descendant of the Badenweilers, nursed in all the luxury which untold wealth can lavish on its favorite, must I perish here, deprived of a loving mother's solicitous attention, in squalor and anguish, with noisome nocturnal fowl for companions?" (He groans. Curtain.)

I think, all told, that the most unbelievable play ever sent to me was one called "The Ice Lens: a Four-Act Play on Academic Immoralities," run off on a press at Sewickley, Pennsyl-

60 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

vania, and sent me by its author, George Frederick Gundelfinger, Ph.D. I should like to quote enough from his indignant preface to illustrate the extraordinary naïveté which is begotten even in a doctor of philosophy the moment he has written a play. That preface, of course, dealt at length with the ignorance and prejudice in the theater which had prevented "The Ice Lens" from being produced. A few extracts from it follow:

The theme of *The Ice Lens* was not created simultaneously with the impulse to develop it. The raw material (raw in more sense than one) from which it has been constructed was being stowed away in my mind, although more or less unconsciously, both during and before my efforts on the song-comedy. But when the idea of writing a comedy occurred to me, this dormant mentality (furnished by several years' residence in a college community as undergraduate, graduate student, instructor and proctor respectively) awoke with amazing alacrity. Hundreds of "little things" I had earlier seen, heard and felt involuntarily, were *recalled* with far more vividness. They were woven together into a play in a very short time—not so very, very short, if one takes into account the nights also, which were, in general, sleepless. . . .

The first two criticisms I received had come from persons whom I did not know from Adam. I had not shown my copy to a single acquaintance before submitting it. It was not that I altogether spurned help from the outside, but rather that I wanted to work in secrecy. The nature of the play demanded this. When you will have become a little more familiar with it, you

THE KNOCK AT THE STAGE-DOOR 61

will understand why I did not seek admonition from some English professor on the *Yale* faculty. (I would probably have received an extremely different kind from the kind I was seeking if I had.) Being absolutely immune from discouragement and having, in addition, that exaggerated sense of individual and independent capability which is characteristic of every artist who *must* arrive (even though he has got to come half way down off his high horse in order to do so), I could not immediately agree with the criticisms I had received, although later I fully appreciated the fact that they contained some truth. . . .

But before sending the punctuated copy of *The Ice Lens* to the press, I decided to make one more appeal to the stage—this time not to a producer but to an actress: Maude Adams. It occurred to me that Miss Adams had done much to further dramatic interests at Yale, and I wondered if she might not be willing to help improve Yale *morally* by means of the drama. I must admit that I had my doubts as to her ability to fight through the rôle of Jeanette Lyon in the Third Act, even though I had seen her *play* the part of a rooster. However, my doubts were unnecessary, for Miss Adams not only never read the manuscript but even ignored the letter in which I had very politely asked her if she would care to do so. . . .

The Yale Alumni Weekly, by means of which the true purpose of the play could have been brought before the graduates, declined to review it, to accept a paid advertisement, or even to mention it under the author's name among the Alumni Notes—a strong and clear proof that *The Ice Lens* was a play with a future. . . .

Frankly speaking, I myself was beginning to discredit the opinion of that earlier critic who said that my work did not show "the instinct for plot and situation which marks a born playwright," although I shall never refrain

from admitting that the original manuscript was crude. It is true that certain species of birds build their nests, the first as well as the last, with extreme care and choice of material, and it is even unexceptionally true that the workmanship of all bees can hardly be improved upon. Yet we know that, in general, instinct implies crudeness, and this is both irrefutably and necessarily so in the case of the human artist. Would any intelligent person expect a born playwright's first product to be as perfect as the first nest of a yellow warbler? It is not enough to be a born playwright; a playwright must *acquire* intellect in addition to his *innate* genius. Egotistic though it may seem, I am going to claim that the original manuscript of *The Ice Lens* did show dramatic instinct, but I wish to add shamefully in the same breath that, despite the fact that I had already acquired both a Ph.B. and a Ph.D. at the time, I had not acquired one smattering of intellect. A thoroughly intellectual person can refer to an event as horrible as the onslaught at Château-Thierry in such a way as to make us think of nothing but an oriole twittering on an apple tree in whose dappled shadow a country maiden is powdering her young lettuce plants with phosphate of lime. "Fertilized with the rich blood of the world's best men, a new springtime is opening on the world," said President Dabney of the University of Cincinnati in a recent baccalaureate. I repeat it, that however devoid of this intellectual element the situations in *The Ice Lens* were, they were not devoid of the instinct of a born playwright.

I once heard Margaret Anglin in *Zira*, and to this day when I read the lines of Jeanette Lyon in the Third Act of my play, I experience the same emotion by means of which Miss Anglin almost lifted me out of my seat. Incidentally, I have yet to hear the college president who can lift me out of my seat, although at a recent commencement in Soldiers' Memorial, Pittsburgh, Pa., I was

THE KNOCK AT THE STAGE-DOOR 63

almost *knocked* out of my seat by a certain L.L.D. (plus a D.D.) as he went leaping about the stage not unlike a mad *dackshund* yelping: "God damn the German government!" Would that he had first gone to Miss Anglin to get a few pointers on how to move one's audience in a less literal sense! I have often thought of Miss Anglin as Jeanette. Not so long ago, without having to wait for an answer to a polite letter, I was discourteous enough to send her a copy of *The Ice Lens* by registered mail. I received an official receipt from the New York post office, but never a word from Zira herself. . . .

To savor the style of "The Ice Lens" and Professor Gundelfinger's notion of human speech as it should take form on the stage, it will suffice to quote the opening scene of his play, which unfolds in a college fraternity dormitory under a "For God, For Country, and For Yale" banner with a dialogue between *Mrs. Dearborn Hunter* and one of the students, *Chauncey Everit DePeyster*. Just listen to them:

MRS. HUNTER [*glancing in the direction of the couch*]. Is n't it nice to be popular like Miss Jeanette? All the young men swarm about her like bees around the honey-suckle. I held the same position in this town when I was a girl. The students used to call me *la belle charmeuse*, and many were the sirens I put to mourning entirely without effort and absolutely without intention. [*She sways her fan languidly.*] Of course I was some thinner then.

DEPEYSTER [*with his usual affectation*]. Presumably

the picket-fence variety of femininity had not yet introduced her meager dimensions into the realm of fashion.

MRS. HUNTER [*with a sigh*]. Dear me! To be popular nowadays, one must be painfully slender; nobody loves the fat woman.

DEPEYSTER. Lament not! There are still some of us who take a great fancy to her jolly good nature, finding ourselves quite indifferent to her corpulent superfluity.

MRS. HUNTER [*with elation*]. Oh, Mr. DePeyster, you are very kind; I do so much appreciate your sympathy.

DEPEYSTER. Forsooth, I see nothing *extraordinaire* in this Miss Lyon.

Only a glimpse can be afforded here of the play's hero, *John Templeton*, a student who is out to reform the other students, feeling as he does that "rectitude is worth more than all of Newton, Vergil and Euclid put together" and eager to show his fellow-student that he is "a coarse unhuman brute living selfishly and sluggishly on the hoard of others, stealing what little it has acquired for itself only by cunning and concealment, everlastingly consuming weeds, quaffing more than its body can hold, and reveling like a glutton over human flesh."

METCALF. You are enthusiastic; but how can this light be given to the many who need it?

TEMPLETON. I am trying to shed it by writing a play.

THE KNOCK AT THE STAGE-DOOR 65

METCALF. But at the same time, you are exposing that which may bring anguish to many an innocent heart which is now apparently happy.

TEMPLETON. Temporary sorrow is the bud which blossoms into true happiness. There is no real happiness in the deferment of grief. This evil, like the poisonous plant in the depths of the forest, will thrive and spread until it is brought out into the sunlight of an open meadow. However intense the pain, I, seemingly *cold*-hearted, shall cut deep with the knife of truth, bring the poison to the surface, and *then* heal the wound with the balm of love.

METCALF. Your task requires courage.

Then, as a parting glimpse of "The Ice Lens," you must eavesdrop on the conversation between *Templeton* and *Reginald Buckingham Adder*, villain of the piece but now reformed. Listen:

ADDER. I cared only for my own happiness and gave no thought to the wretched condition of others. I was worse than a selfish fool! I was a greedy glutton taking more than my fill of beastly pleasures, and, added to all, I was an infernal liar. I tried to win deceptively the love of an innocent girl, and, when she justly cast me off, I insulted her with accusations as false as they were vile.

TEMPLETON. You refer to—

ADDER. Please don't breathe her name. I deny my ears the pleasure of hearing it; I forbid my lips the honor to speak it. But I am repaid; God knows I am well repaid for it all. My own roommate reports my dishonesty to the faculty, and heralds to the public my relations with a harlot. My university expels me; my body suffers incessant torture from the fearful pain

of unsightly diseases; my friends no longer know me; and worst of all—my own mother, who has never drawn me to her heart, disowns me. God help me to forget the man she calls her husband; I curse every dollar he has thrust into my reckless hand; I no longer care to own his name. I long to start anew, for, although I have rendered myself unfit for a husband and a father, I can still be a man—a man earning a deserved existence by his own honest labor. But how—how shall I do it? Look at me; my God! look at me!

TEMPLETON. However black the sky may seem, in time the sun will shine; however wicked our souls appear, if we will but wash away the scum, we shall find good hidden beneath it. [*The faint outlines of distant mountain peaks appear in the fog.*]

In the books of the older critics—Sarcey, Archer, and all—there occurs again and again the phrase, the obligatory scene. The outlines of one are built up as “The Ice Lens” unfolds—the scene where *John Templeton* is taken out by a group of his fellow-classmen and spanked. However, one reads on and on without ever coming to it.

The amazing thing about “The Ice Lens” is not that the smoldering Gundelfinger should have written all this but that he should have written it in the form of a play. After all, a play is a work of the imagination to be performed by another on an instrument. That instrument is the theater, and this strong American propensity to

THE KNOCK AT THE STAGE-DOOR 67

write plays without first having learned a little something about the instrument is a trifle too reminiscent of the story of the man who, when asked if he could play the violin, answered grandly: "I don't know. I never tried."

His difficulty is that a play is a living thing, which cannot live while part of it is lifeless. It is conceivable that a poem that was, for the most, unbelievable rubbish, might still have within it a line or two of magical and immortal poetry. Long ago some one told me the story of an editor's receiving reams of the most incredible metrical balderdash from an aspiring poetess who had, however, stumbled on one ringing, unforgettable line. In the midst of all her grotesque truck, the editor found himself staring wide-eyed at this single line:

And the gray owl called to its mate in the wood that a
man lay dead in the road.

But such momentary inspiration is lost in the collapse of a worthless play. To say of a bad play that some of it is pretty good is a little too much like saying of an unpleasing egg that at least part of it is fresh.

III

GUNPOWDER PLOTS

AS a playgoer, I am a little weary of many too recurrent phenomena in the American theater, but of all things I resent most hotly the employment of firearms to unnerve an audience. It is such a contemptible subterfuge. Your unscrupulous playwright resorts to it upon the most feeble excuses. When in doubt, brandish a revolver: that has been his little motto these many seasons. Whenever he feels that a maiden in distress, or an ominous shadow cast upon a window-blind, or a cry of terror heard off-stage is not quite enough to induce the desired agitation in the play-going bosom, he points a Colts forty-five at that bosom and feels that the drama has been rescued again. Draw a gun and you will draw an audience. There, apparently, is the first precept in that hardy manual, "How to Be a Playwright." I wonder.

I wonder how many playgoers are, as I am,

gun-shy—how many are, as I am, rendered dumbly miserable by the notice that a pistol is to play one of the leading rôles in the piece of the evening. The stage revolver, harmless enough in itself, is one of the great American nuisances, like the ticket speculator and the dialect comedian and the forty-two-year-old ingénue. We bear up under them. But who likes them?

The purpose of the pistol in stage-craft is akin to the rôle of the harrow in agriculture, or the business of the masseur's fingers before the cold cream is applied. It brings the playgoer forward to the edge of his seat, induces a mild sweat, and leaves him in that state of taut nerves which makes him a pitiably easy victim to any suggestion the author may have in mind.

I resent this because it is taking a base advantage. It is too easy. It is like cheating at solitaire. Your true playwright, like Frank Craven, is above such mean devices. In his comedy, "The First Year," he brews the same suspense, the same sweet agony, but he does it with some chivalry. He throws the playgoer into a palpitation over the question as to whether or not that green waitress will remember to bring in the melon *before* the soup. Or, as she stands gesturing noncha-

lantly with the vegetable dish held in her hand, whether that dish will or will not crash against the edge of the dining-room table. At that magnificently suspensive moment in "The First Year," I have counted eight women in front of me all cowering and putting their fingers to their ears. With the peril of that vegetable dish Craven contrives more genuine dramatic agony than do the bullying melodramatists with whole arsenals at their disposal.

My favorite playwright is Euripides because he wrote ninety pieces for the theater without introducing a gun in one of them. But, frustrated by the fact that it is not every evening one can find a piece of his being acted in my town, I then go by preference to plays involving the villainy of toreadors or to hot romances unfolded against Sicilian or Etruscan backgrounds. Even then the assurance is not absolute, but the chances are that whatever murder is to be attended to during the evening will be managed with a knife stuck quietly and modestly between the ribs.

I had hoped that the war would cure me of these weak tremors. I remember saying as much the night that the Argonne drive began. It was two o'clock on that momentous September morn-

ing in 1918, and up the road that led from Souilly toward Montfaucon three transported Broadway-ites were plodding side by side, a quondam actor and two ex-dramatic critics: William Slavens McNutt, Arthur Ruhl, and myself. (Ruhl, as I recall, wore a shawl). The guns were firing in concert from Alsace to the channel—a 400-mile row of cannon, all going off at one time, the heaviest artillery preparation the world had ever heard. I had been spending a considerable portion of the preceding three months under the guns and had soon become so used to them that I could sleep placidly away, just as one gets used to a flat near the Sixth Avenue Elevated or to a berth on the New York Central. And even to this monstrous redoubling of the ructions, this continuous blast at which the very earth twitched and trembled like a sleeping setter with a nightmare, we became accustomed, and by daylight were talking through it as though it had not been there.

And I remember agreeing with Ruhl that at least the war would do one thing for us. The world might remain a somewhat precarious place for democracy, but we could reasonably expect to attend an American crook play without going through all the old pangs of the gun-shy. At one

silly little revolver thrust suddenly into the suspense of the scene, we should merely yawn and wonder where to sup after the play.

In my first week back home I went guilelessly to "The Follies." There was an interlude, intended, I understand, to be extremely comic, in which that fine comedian, Bert Williams, had to sit in front of a shooting-gallery target (like a large black son of a latter-day Tell) and suffer the expert marksman to pick off the bulbs which formed an aureole for his woolly head. Williams was supposed to turn as white as possible and tremble with fear. He did. So did I. But *he* was acting. The war had been fought in vain.

Small wonder, then, if I find myself hoping in each scene that a temporary derangement of the property-man will have loaded the revolver with something worse than blanks, and that an actor or so will be mowed down before my eyes. This uncalculated thrill has not yet happened, but I suppose we all keep on going to the theater in the hope that some day it will.

Failing that sweet revenge, we can distil some comfort when the gun play goes wrong in less sensational ways. I wish I had been there on that great occasion they tell about when the gun fired

at *Simon Legree* did not go off. *Click-click*, and not a sound. *Legree*, with fine presence of mind, pressed a hand to his breast, cast his eyes upward, cried out weakly, "Curses, that old heart trouble come back again," and fell dead.

And then one night there was the gleam of a silver lining in the cloud that overhung that mad English melodrama, "Bulldog Drummond." The exceptionally heavy villain was supposed to gain gratified possession of the shiny revolver and fire point-blank at the dauntless bosom of A. E. Matthews as *Drummond*. There was to be no report. Matthews was to smile and say contemptuously, "My good man, I would scarcely have let you amuse yourself with that toy had I not known it was unloaded." (Business of looking thwarted on the part of the heavy.) Only, on this one night, the aforesaid heavy picked up the wrong revolver. He fired twice. Both shots sprayed the heroic waistcoat with powder. Of course that did not hurt Matthews himself any, but it did considerably impair the force of the line just ahead. So Matthews looked contemptuously at the fellow, murmured, "You're a damned bad shot, my good man," and sauntered off amid the audible appreciation of a much-amused audi-

ence. Afterward, the heavy actor challenged him in the wings. "If that unfortunate contretemps should occur again," he said, "I trust you will not indulge yourself in that wretched jest. It seems, if I may say so, in questionable taste. It made me look such a fool."

But these satisfactions are rare. I am tired of gun play on the stage. I am tired of many things on the stage. The following items in the theater, for instance, all weary me a little:

1. Revivals of "Twelfth Night" in which the *Viola* is played by a matron of forty-six years.

2. English comedies in which, just before the final curtain, the tall muscular hero announces his intention of leaving next morning for the Straits Settlements or Burma and "escape from it all," thus causing the pallid heroine to rush into his arms.

3. French comedies in which the translator's notion of simple idiomatic speech might be judged from this sample: "It is not necessary that you go, is it not, Mussoor?"

4. American comedies of sentiment in which the peculations of the young bank clerk and the indiscretions of the heroine are all purged by the device of adjourning the play to a rural setting

and playing the final moments against a green canvas meadow.

5. Touching scenes acted on the assumption that no mother embraces her progeny without rolling her eyes tearfully to the chandelier.

6. Plays in which any one of the following lines occurs more than eight times:

How many lumps?

There must be some mistake.

You here?

You mean?

I was never more serious in my life.

I do not know why I am telling all this to you.

Won't you sit down?

But I am most tired of being threatened with a pistol-shot. The next time a second act begins with a frowning broker entering the richly carpeted library, walking across to the massive, carved walnut desk, opening the desk drawer, taking out a bright revolver, examining it, nodding with grim satisfaction, putting it back, closing the drawer softly, and ringing for the butler—the next time that happens, I shall reach for my hat and quietly leave the theater. I shall drive immediately to the Pennsylvania Station, take a train for Washington, and call next morning on the secretary of state. Dispassionately but firmly,

I shall tell him that at the next international conference on disarmament at which the United States is represented, he must take up seriously the question of disarming the drama. That is, if he wants me to go on reviewing plays.

IV

CAPSULE CRITICISM

THERE is a popular notion that a dramatic criticism, to be worthy of the name, must be an article of at least one thousand words, mostly polysyllables and all devoted—perfectly devoted—to the grave discussion of some play as written and performed. To this notion, it must be sadly admitted, each generation of writers on the theater have lent some color.

In such an article it is presumed that there will be one judicious use of the word “adequate” and one resort to the expression “treading the boards”; also at least one regretful shaking of the head over the hopeless inferiority of the performance in question to (a) the way it was done in some other country two years before or (b) the way it would have been done in the critic’s own country thirty years ago. Such ingredients are expected with reasonable confidence. But one thing is certain. The piece, to be real dramatic criticism, can scarcely be briefer than a thousand words.

The tradition of prolixity and the dullness in all such writing is as old as Aristotle and as lasting as William Archer. A man who will talk gaily of a play will yet feel a certain solemnity wetting down his spirits the moment he finds himself called upon to discuss it in print. Even Mr. Dickens, who could take his beloved theater lightly enough when he was weaving it into a novel and who always packed his letters full of the most engaging accounts of the farces and melodramas he was seeing, became rigid with self-importance and chill with scrupulosity the moment he knew he was reviewing a piece for publication. If he had undertaken to supply such comment to "The Examiner" or to our own "Atlantic," a voice within him seemed to whisper, "Remember, now, you're a dramatic critic." And, lo! he was no more Dickensy than the merest penny-a-liner. This was true to some extent of Walt Whitman and certainly was true of Edgar Allen Poe. (The strangest people, it will be observed, have put in some time as dramatic critics; such people, for instance, as Eugene Field and Richard Harding Davis and Edward Bok and Elihu Root). Probably they were all verbose.

Yet I suspect it could be demonstrated that the

most telling of all dramatic criticisms have found expression in less than fifty words. Also that the best of all were never written at all. To substantiate this, I have been raking my memory for the ones that have lodged there while longer and more majestic utterances have faded out of mind as completely as though they had never been written.

What we are looking for, of course, is the happy sentence that speaks volumes. As an example, consider the familiar problem presented by the players who can do everything on the stage except act. I have in mind a still celebrated beauty to whom that beauty opened wide the stage-door full thirty years ago. Since then she has devoted herself most painstakingly to justifying her admission. She has keen intelligence and great industry. She has learned every trick of voice and gesture that can be taught. She has acquired everything except some substitute for the inborn gift. Something to that effect, expressed, of course, as considerately as possible, ought, it seems to me, to be a part of any report on her spasmodic reappearances.

It usually takes about five hundred words. Yet Mr. Cohan managed it pretty well in a single

sentence when he was passing on a similar case in one of his own companies. An attempt was made to argue with him that the veteran actor under review was a good fellow and all that. "He's a fine fellow, all right," Cohan assented amiably enough, and then added, with murderous good-humor, "There's really only one thing I've got against him. He's stage-struck."

You see, often the perfection of these capsule criticisms are achieved by mere bluntness—are arrived at by the no more ingenious process than that of speaking out in meeting. I was struck with that on the melancholy occasion when John and Ethel Barrymore lent a momentary and delusive glamour to a piece called "Clair de Lune" by Michael Strange, the exquisitely beautiful poetess whom Mr. Barrymore had just married. By the time its third act had unfolded before the pained eyes of its first audience, there was probably not a single person in that audience who was not thinking that, with all the good plays lying voiceless on the shelf, Michael Strange's shambling and laboriously *macabre* piece would scarcely have been produced had it not been for the somewhat irrelevant circumstance of her having married Mr. Barrymore, the surest means,

apparently, of engaging his priceless services for one's drama. Now, some such opinion, I say, was buzzing in every first-night head. All the critics thought just that. Yet they all described nervous circles around this central idea, dancing skittishly about it as though it had been a May-pole. Full of what Gladys Unger was once inspired to call "a dirty delicacy," reluctant, perhaps, to acknowledge the personal equation in criticism, and weighed down, probably, by an ancient respect for the marriage tie, they avoided all audible speculation as to why Mr. Barrymore had put the piece on at all. All, that is, except one. Mr. Whittaker of "The Chicago Tribune"—the same Mr. Whittaker, by the way, who married the fair Ina Claire—cheerfully put the prevailing thought into three devastating words. He entitled his review: "For the Love of Mike."

That is not the only time I have seen the very essence and spirit of a review distilled in a single head-line. It happened on the occasion when the late Sir Herbert Tree, ever and always recognizable behind the most ornate make-ups, ever and always himself through all faint-hearted efforts at disguise, appeared for the first time in London in "The Merchant of Venice." It was on that

occasion that his more illustrious brother, Max Beerbohm, then merely the dramatic critic of "The Saturday Review," went back-stage to felicitate the star but was overlooked in the crush of notables who were crowding around. When Tree chided him afterwards for unfraternal neglect, Max murmured: "Ah, I was there but you did not know me in your beard." Of course Max could not write the review of his own brother's performance—a task delegated, therefore, to John Palmer, whose comment on the play was awaited, naturally enough, with considerable interest. Palmer wrote a polite, though mildly derisive, review of the production and entitled it: "Shylock as Mr. Tree."

I find that the crispest reviews which come back in this effort at memory have taken many forms. For instance, when it was quite the leading American sin to attend the agitating performances of "Sapho" by Olga Nethersole, Franklin P. Adams made his comment in one quatrain:

I love little Olga,
Her plays are so warm.
And if I don't see them
They'll do me no harm.

The late Charles Frohman, on the other hand, was likely to sum up plays most felicitously in

telegrams. Once, when he was producing an English comedy at his cherished Empire Theater in New York, he received just after the première a cable of eager, though decently nervous, inquiry from the author in London, who could not bear to wait until the reviews and the box-office statements reached him. "How 's it going?" was the inquiry. Frohman cabled back: "It's gone."

Of course, many of the best capsule criticisms are classics. There was Warren's tart comment on Joe Jefferson's performance as *Bob Acres* in "The Rivals," a brilliant feat of comedic genius made out of whole cloth, so little origin did it have in the rôle as originally written. "Ha!" quoth Warren, "Sheridan twenty miles away." And there was the feline stroke usually ascribed to Wilde—the one which said that Tree's *Hamlet* was funny without being vulgar. And there was the much-quoted knifing of still another *Hamlet* by an unidentified bandit who said, after the performance, that it would have been a fine time to settle the great controversy as to who wrote the play: one need merely have watched beside the graves of Shakespere and Bacon to see which one turned over.

Fairly familiar, also, are two ascribed by tradition to Eugene Field, in the days when he was

84 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

dramatic critic of "The Denver Post" and used to go to the once-famous Tabor Grand to see "Modjesky ez Cameel," the days when the peak of the season for him was marked by the engagement of a vagrant, red-headed soubrette named Minnie Maddern. Of one performance of "Hamlet" there, Field's entire review consisted of two short melancholy sentences. He wrote: "So-and-so played Hamlet last night at the Tabor Grand. He played it till one o'clock." And it was Field who haunted the declining years of Creston Clarke with his review of that actor's *Lear*. Clarke, a journeying nephew of Edwin Booth, passed through Denver and gave there a singularly unimpressive and unregal performance in that towering tragedy. Field could n't bear it and finally vented his emotions in one sentence. Said he: "Mr. Clarke played the King all evening as though under constant fear that some one else was about to play the Ace."

Of course some beautiful capsule criticisms are doomed to a lesser fame because it is so difficult to detach them from their circumstances and their context. This is true, for instance, of several deft summaries by Heywood Broun. When some years ago one Butler Davenport put on a juve-

nilely obscene little play at his own little theater in New York, Broun scowled and wrote, "Some one should spank young Mr. Davenport and take away his piece of chalk." Then there was the hilarious episode which grew out of the production for one afternoon in the spring of 1917 of Wedekind's "Frühlingserwachen," which Broun translated as "The Spring Offensive." In his little piece on the subject, he mentioned casually that to his mind an actor named Stein gave in the leading rôle the worst performance he had ever seen on any stage. Stein sued for damages, but the court decided, after some diverting testimony, that after all a critic was free to express his esthetic judgment, however incompetent, or however painful it might prove to the subject. Later it became Mr. Broun's embarrassing duty to review another performance by the same aggrieved Stein in another play. Broun evaded the duty until the last sentence, where he could have been found murmuring, "Mr. Stein was not up to his standard."

I am inclined to think, however, that the best of the tabloid reviews have been oral. Coleridge's famous comment on Kean's *Hamlet*—that seeing it was like reading Shakspeare by flashes of light-

ning—was said by him but written by somebody else, was n't it? Certainly the two best of my day were oral criticisms. One was whispered in my ear by a comely young actress named Tallulah Bankhead, who was sitting incredulous before a deliberate and intentional revival of Maeterlinck's "Aglavaine and Selysette," a monstrous piece of perfumed posturing, meaning exactly nothing. Two gifted young actresses and a considerable bit of scenery were involved, and much pretentious rumbling of voice and wafting of gesture had gone into the enterprise. Miss Bankhead, fearful, apparently, lest she be struck dead for impiety, became desperate enough to whisper, "There is less in this than meets the eye."

The other was tossed off by that delightful companion and variegated actor, Beerbohm Tree. Hurrying from California to New York, he joined at the eleventh hour the already elaborated rehearsals of "Henry VIII," into which he was to step in the familiar scarlet of *Wolsey*. He was expected to survey whatever had been accomplished by his delegates and pass judgment. He approved cheerfully enough of everything until he came to the collection of damsels that had been dragged into the theater as ladies in waiting

to the queen. He looked at them in pained and prolonged dissatisfaction and then said what we have all wanted to say of the extra-women in nearly every throne-room and ball-room and school-room scene since the theater began. "Ladies," said Tree, peering at them plaintively through his monocle, "just a little more virginity, if you don't mind."

V

FOR THE KIDDIES

AFTER many bitter experiences in the theaters of New York at holiday-time, I feel I should warn all playgoers, and especially all parents, nurses, governesses, and aunts, against any performance especially advertised as intended for children. When the playbill further announces that in addition to presenting something meant for "the kiddies," the management intends to give the proceeds to this or that suffering charity, you are hereby cautioned to reach for your hat and run as though the devil were after you.

Too often a benefit performance is merely an outlet for somebody's exhibition complex, and when that is coupled with a little of the insufferable condescension which some adults persist in showing toward the uncorrupted, the mere spectator is in for a harrowing spectacle. I have sat in Christmas week through the most kittenish of recitals by Kitty Cheatham, surrounded by rows and rows of suffering innocents. I have seen a

group of well-meaning grown-ups take "Alice in Wonderland" and utterly spoil it for a whole theaterful of small boys and girls who had never done anything to them. I have seen Charles Dickens's immortal "Christmas Carol" done into a marionette show, so involved and so indistinct that only those who had read the tale often enough to know it by heart could have had the faintest notion of what it was all about or the least equipment for being anything more than intensely annoyed. At each of these benign festivals, I know that the children in their hearts were wishing they could escape to the nearest Chaplin picture down the street, where, as a matter of fact, they would have found a thousand times more art, a thousand times more beauty, a thousand times more truth.

When, in the name of Charles Dickens, of all persons, a monster benefit was held in London early in 1922 for the endowment of a Children's Library, the blessed committee in charge wrote to Shaw for his benediction and had their noses bitten off with the following retort:

I am obliged to make an iron rule not to give my name to bodies that I do not actually work on. But I am good for a couple of guineas if the committee will

assure me that the library will not consist of what are called children's books. Dickens took care to point out that he read Smollett and Fielding and all the other grown-up books he could lay his hands on (as I did myself), and that any harm that was in them did not exist for him. If the library is to be in the hands of people who ban "The Arabian Nights" as immoral and "Roderick Random" as improper, it will be fraud to use the name of Dickens to get money for it. I should say that the first condition of a children's library is that there should be no children's books in it.

To which I say, "Amen." Shaw was saying what had been long in my heart and which welled up most irrepressibly one afternoon not long ago when the few free hours of the Little Theater's stage were preempted by an arty and somewhat insipid revival of "The Winter's Tale," which was tagged in a singularly forbidding description as "the first synthetic production in New York." The proceeds were dedicated to the New York Kindergarten Association and the program further asserted that the production had been "organized by a group of parents and others interested in the establishment of a theater for young people." Under the spell of this sort of drum-beating, considerable numbers of youngsters attended, marshaled by resolute governesses. The spectacle of their confinement could be fittingly

described only by the Mark Twain who wrote the harrowing Sunday-school chapter in "Tom Sawyer." The performance provoked in the adult passer-by a variety of emotions, including wonder and cynical amusement, and stirred up a few reflections on Shakspeare and benefits and labels, and what not.

For some reason it brought suddenly back to mind the occasion when the desire to produce a play—any play—burned unquenchably within a group of sophomoric bosoms in Hamilton College. There being at the time no dramatic society on the campus, it was necessary to form one, and there having been not the slightest trace of popular demand for such an enterprise, its promoters felt a trifle apprehensive. Two unwelcome contingencies suggested themselves as on the cards for the première. The rival classes might throw things, or—which was a prospect almost equally dismaying—they might not even attend. After due reflection on these possibilities, the wily promoters announced that the entire profits of the venture would be poured into the empty exchequer of one of the athletic teams and thus, in one superb gesture, they justified their scheme and gagged their critics.

This memory, in turn, brought up with it out of the more recent past an utterly irrelevant story of a production that was never made at all. According to the tale, which may or may not be true, a Broadway manager decided to test the values of a problematical manuscript by projecting it for one matinée performance that could be handily managed by one of his companies then playing an established success in a city not more than a thousand miles from Unadilla Forks, New York. The proceeds were to go to a local charity and the actors were, therefore, requested to play without any other compensation than the heart-warming consciousness of doing good—good to the poor, that is, not to the manager. Quite crudely at this point the Actors' Equity raised the question whether the local charity had asked for the performance, or whether the performance, needing at once an audience and an excuse, had asked for the charity. It seemed that the latter was the case, whereupon the players insisted perversely on being paid for their work. So the performance was never held. The tale may or may not be true. Perhaps it is only one of those stories which get around somehow.

In the case of "The Winter's Tale" we are

informed and believe that Mr. and Mrs. Maxwell Armfield put it on by invitation. We could even believe that, though reluctant, they were persuaded to produce it because of a burning conviction that there should be more funds in the treasury of the New York Kindergarten Association. But, because of the spurious element in so many so-called benefits, it is hereby suggested that it would have been better—and that in all such cases it would be better—to have the announcements and the programs answer specifically in behalf of the public the question raised by the Actors' Equity Association in behalf of the players. Such specification would have been peculiarly suitable in this instance because of the suspicion which the performance itself was bound to beget in the mind of the crafty playgoer. He was certain to wonder why any charity in need of funds should lean on so broken a reed as an arrestingly incompetent production of one of Shakspeare's less popular comedies. Becoming suspicious, he would then wonder why on earth any one honestly interested in promoting a theater for youngsters should have found appropriate for the purpose a production of this play about marital jealousy, trial for adultery, and what not, a production,

moreover, from which some one had squeezed or washed almost all the joy and color and vitality.

There is a good deal of nonsense aired from time to time in behalf of a theater for children. Such an institution, while requiring considerable endowment, is entirely a possibility. It is not a crying need, because every season brings many plays to town which are entirely suitable for playgoers in pinafores and knickerbockers, infinitely more suitable, for instance, than "The Winter's Tale," even when censored and cut to the quick as this one was. Effort could more frugally be spent in arranging daytime performances of such plays, as did the Drama League with "Abraham Lincoln" last season. Or by circularizing apprehensive parents with weekly advices as to the moral state of the current bills. Perhaps the advisory board could even undertake the burden of purchasing seats, though this last suggestion is reluctantly set down by one who thinks all young folks should begin their play-going careers in the gallery and move downstairs by easy stages with advancing years. Presenting a youngster with two aisle seats in the orchestra is like arranging for him to enter college as a senior. He will lose something in the process.

The only respect in which this "Winter's Tale"

seemed peculiarly adapted to the young was its cabbage-leaf aspect caused by a cutting and rearrangement of the text so ruthless as almost entirely to delete that decent interval which Shakspeare provided to allow for the birth of *Perdita*. The term "synthetic" used in describing the production doubtless referred to some effort to harmonize all the colors, movements, lights, and tones with the mood of each scene. The only perceptible result of such effort was in the pictures of pleasing composition into which the players were forever falling, somewhat in the manner of kaleidoscopic fragments falling into patterns. The concentration on this phase of the synthesis was so fierce that there was seemingly no time to develop the acting values of the play or to find and train voices for an appreciative utterance of its beautiful text.

If a note of exasperation has crept into this report, it must come from a certain weariness at the frequent spectacle of the Shakspeare and Ibsen plays being manhandled up our side streets in a manner to which no one would dream of subjecting the dramas of Samuel Shipman, for instance. The weariness increases when the wiseacres deduce from the results that the public does not want to see Shakspeare and Ibsen.

VI

BITTER MEMORIES

THEATRICAL managers to the contrary notwithstanding, the hardy and tireless scouts who do reconnaissance work at first nights for the purpose of reporting back to the main body of the theater-going public are usually reviled in the morning mail, not for their captiousness, but rather for their too genial tolerance, their too rosy spectacles. It is preposterous propaganda which suggests that these good scouts are a sour-visaged lot, who maintain a ghoulish (or at best an impassive) death-watch over all the new plays that come to town. As a matter of fact, they are the incorrigibly hopeful part of every first audience, pathetically eager to believe that something fine and memorable is about to be discovered in the next act.

One of the most distinguished, gracious, and charming of their number has been pictured by an impertinent young cartoonist as standing forlorn

in a festive foyer and murmuring: "I'm afraid it's a hit!" But the fellow was just spoofing. Unbridled enthusiasm, incredible elasticity, and tumultuous overpraise are the distinguishing marks of the whole platoon. The dramatic critics of New York, ranging, as they do, from the late twenties to the early eighties and extraordinarily varied in their origins, education, intelligence, and personal beauty, are alike in one respect. They are all be-trousered Pollyannas.

The Pollyanna note can be traced here and there to timidity or indolence, with an occasional faint aroma of corruption, but for the most part the explanation is simpler and less discreditable. If your professional playgoer seems to think that a fair farce is good and a good melodrama superb, it is probably because only he knows how bad a play can be. He grows delirious about the best in the theater because he alone knows the worst.

A protesting note in the morning mail, so frequent that it is almost a form letter, is wont to read as follows:

How could you have said that "The Yellow Stenographer" was a pretty good comedy? I went last night, after reading your notice, and thought it the worst show I had ever seen.

To which one of two replies naturally springs to mind, either "Ah, then, you never saw 'The Phantom Legion'" or "Why, you lucky stiff!" After all, the playgoer who bides his time and, on the recommendation of the neighbors and the faintly remembered newspaper accounts, goes only to a dozen of the best things given in the course of a season, is inevitably more exacting and more critical than the chronic first-nighter, whose every play is a pig in a poke. No one could help enjoying "The Dover Road," but they enjoy it most who remember "The Survival of the Fittest." Considered all alone, "Jane Clegg," the Ervine comedy at the Garrick, seemed a creditable achievement. Compared with some of the other plays about unfaithful husbands which the same year witnessed, it seemed a breath-taking masterpiece.

In the spring of the year, when it is customary for the dramatic pages to break out in a rash of summaries of the season, with solemnly compiled lists of the Ten Best Plays of the Year, it might be more profitable to pause and consider what have been the Ten Worst Plays. By reason of themselves, or their performance, or both, I selected these for the season of 1919-20:

"Katy's Kisses."

The Poe playlets.

"Polyphème."

"First Is Last."

"The Phantom Legion."

"The Red Dawn."

"The Unknown Woman."

"Three 's a Crowd."

"George Washington."

"The Blue Flame."

It was, as I look back on it, a fair list, although it is possible that a plebiscite would have substituted "Carnival" or "Curiosity" or "Where's Your Wife?" But, you argue, you never even heard of most of these. Which only goes to show how little you realize why the boiling-point of the dramatic critic's enthusiasm is so low.

Take those Poe playlets, for instance. They were given for a run of one performance at the Little Theater. There were two of them. The first, called "Bon Bon," consisted largely of classical recitative, with the tedium relieved by quaint mispronunciations. The other was called "Lenore"—carefully pronounced Leonore. The title evidently referred to Poe's girl-wife, for that is what she was called on this occasion. The ris-

100 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

ing curtain disclosed the Poes standing mid-stage somewhat in the postures associated with clothing dummies.

POE [*dismally*]. "Blackwood's" has refused "The Gold-bug."

LENORE [*in ecstasy*]. Never mind, Edgar. I love thee and some day thou wilt be recognized as a great poet. Meanwhile, couldst thou not cheer my grief and suffering by reciting some of thy beautiful songs?

POE [*brightening visibly*]. How would you like to hear "The Bells"?

LENORE [*happily*]. Yes, yes, dear Edgar, recite "The Bells."

After this much introduction, which is set down by a faulty memory and pretends to give only the general impression of the text, Poe recited. The effort surpassed anything of its kind ever heard upon a high school platform. The very word "tintinabulation" became an oration in itself—an oration with gestures. Then Mrs. Poe died. The audience was not taken by surprise. It was not feeling any too well, either. A final scene, given after some portion of the house had departed with a bold pretense of thinking it all over, revealed Poe in moonlit solitude, reciting—you've guessed it—"The Raven." That melancholy creature was discovered atop the bust, where a shirt-sleeved arm could occasionally be descried

manipulating it. The croak of "Nevermore," however, seemed to come from beneath the stage and seemed less the utterance of a prophetic bird than the protest of the proverbially audible Bull of Bashan.

American audiences are never violent and seldom even decently resentful, like those that boo and whistle in London and Paris when their sensibilities are outraged. This one was unusually meek and mild. Of the fifty persons present nearly all stayed to the end and then left quietly—even the old gentleman who had sat throughout with his head bowed on the seat-back in front of him. Perhaps, in this connection, it should be further explained that the two plays, together with the long intermission that separated them, lasted less than an hour.

Or consider "Polyphème." This metrical French version of the Cyclops legend was presented at the Lenox Theater by Carlo Liten and Yvonne Garrick. A sparse audience waited until nine o'clock, when a well-nourished and enthusiastic Frenchman came before the curtain and gave vent to a half-hour *causerie* on the life of Albert Semain, the previously obscure author of "Polyphème. He told how he felt when he first

102 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

met Semain, how Semain felt next, how Semain felt when he was n't elected to the Academy, how he would have felt if he had been, etc.

Then the play began, revealing the chubby and winsome Mademoiselle Garrick, clad in a pastoral and wreathed bit of white muslin, and Monsieur Liten (who is somewhat of Walter Hampden's proportions), dressed in a simple, unpretentious loin-cloth. The play lasted a little more than half an hour. The abandon of its performance was somewhat restricted by the size of the Lenox stage, which made it difficult for *Polyphème* to leap about much or even to gesture passionately without uprooting the trees and generally agitating the landscape.

The big moment came when the sea giant discovered the girl and a shepherd boy (who wore an expensive fur rug) lying together on a mossy bank, a sweetly Arcadian picture. Behind them *Polyphème* made moan. His distress could be heard for blocks, but not, apparently, by the blissful causes thereof. It is true that every now and again the girl would sit up and murmur "Hark, hark!" or something French to that effect, but always her shepherd lover would say: "'T is naught, my sweet," and the mutual endearments

would be resumed. Finally the boy departed (presumably to tend his flocks) and the despondent *Polyphème* withdrew to the wings, put out his one eye, roared with pain, came back, made gestures of love and despair over the prostrate girl (who had dropped down on another bank for *quarante* winks), and walked off into the ocean. All this was accompanied by harp strains from the wings. It seems incredible now, but unless memory has played us false the music selected was Handel's "Largo."

Another play followed. Your correspondent will say nothing about it. He did not see it. He had withdrawn to the sidewalk, ostensibly for a smoke, and once outside had fled into the night.

The accounts of these two premières may suggest what hazards the scouts encounter in your service. Scouts? The figure is inadequate. The dramatic critics are like the slaves of old who, in the brave days when everybody dressed as though for a Maxfield Parrish drawing and secret poison was likely to be discovered in the most innocent and succulent dish, were employed to taste those dishes first. If they lived, the masters then sat down to the feast. If they died, it did n't matter, matter, matter.

VII

THE TERRIBLE TRANSLATION

ANY peaceful, unoffending playgoer who finds himself seized by some daily or weekly and sent off to the theater with instructions to review a play can escape unobserved if he will follow a few simple rules of conduct. If, for instance, the piece deals with the upper ten, he need only say that the society folk on the stage seemed more like longshoremen and washladies out on a clam-bake. If the play be an imported one, he can shake his head sadly over the sorry contrast between the pitiable American production and the performance of the same play given the preceding April at the Kleines Kunsttheater in Prague. He may not have seen that original performance, but neither will any of his readers, and so there will be no argument. And if the piece is a translation from the French, he himself need know no more than just enough French to keep the barber from putting brilliantine on his hair in order to shudder fastidiously over the deplorable

THE TERRIBLE TRANSLATION 105

translation. For in the cases of nineteen out of twenty French plays produced in New York in a single season, he will be standing on indisputable ground.

The translators usually engaged by American producers for such work are either men who cannot read French or who cannot write English. They achieve either a weird jargon that is half Harlem and half Montparnasse or they turn all the speeches into an Ollendorff idiom the like of which never found voice on land or sea. The heroines of such hybrids are given either to remarks like this: "Cheese it! Voilà le policeman!" or to remarks like this: "Is it not that it is necessary that the aunt of my friend assist?" My own discomforts at such productions have ranged all the way from the paltry jingles into which Granville Barker turned the lovely verse of Guitry's "Deburau" to the quaint adaptation of "Les Noces d'Argent," which was credited at the time to Grace George. In it one important scene revolved around a coveted sideboard, which, because it had been referred to in the French text as a *commode*, was docilely and grotesquely called a commode in West Forty-eighth Street.

Against such absurdities, it is well, probably,

that we should all mutiny from time to time, but it must be admitted that the Broadwayites who turn French plays into American are adroit, facile, brilliant philologists compared with the translators who turn English plays into French or who flavor a Parisian text with an occasional dizzy flight into English. There have been, of course, several classic disasters achieved in the process, including the feat of the translator who pondered over the phrase, "so woebegone," in "Henry IV" and finally wrote, "*Ainsi, douleur, va t'en*," and the version of Cibber's "Love's Last Shift," which appeared on the boulevards under the title, "La Dernière Chemise de l'Amour."

But to suggest that such slightly imperfect mastery of English is still characteristic of the French author, let me call attention to the text of "My Love—Mon Amour," a neat comedy by the celebrated Tristan Bernard, which appeared in Paris early in 1922. In it the young heiress, around whom the four acts turned and twisted, was discovered giving English lessons in a remote French village on the coast. She was in the midst of one of these when along came an English tourist, and the glibness with which she was able to converse with him quite graveled the listening French. I

THE TERRIBLE TRANSLATION 107

quote their very words as they appeared in the "L'Illustration" text.

Said the Englishman: "Excuse me. I can't speak French. I want ask for the way to Villers-Bocage? I shall return to the inn of Villers-Bocage because I leaved my spectacles in my room. Do you believe if I am able to buy spectacles in this city?" To which the fair Jeanne replied, in English every bit as good as his, "It is very easy, sir. You can find spectacles in the Station Street near." To which, naturally enough, he made answer: "Thank's, miss. Good bye sir! Very obliged." This was all so charming that one was quite delighted when, a little later, the Englishman reappeared and said: "I did not find any spectacles in the shop that you indicate me. Is there another optician in Avranches?" "Oh, sir," replied one of the young students of English, "I think there is any other." The Englishman seemed doubtful. "There are no many commodities in Avranches," he said. "It is really a little hote." That, of course, was absurd. The Frenchman replied warmly: "Avranches, sir, is the most jolly town of the coast. It's an ideal place, and all the happiness of the world is in Avranches!" Which elicited from the English-

108 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

man this parting shot: "I am going to visit it again but until now I am not at all of your advice."

And so on and so on. But if you really want to read English as she is wrote in the French theater, consider this lovely fragment which came to me in a circular from the little Tréteau Fortuny, where they were playing "Mrs. Warren's Profession" when I was passing through Paris not long ago:

LADY AND GENTLEMAN

We have learned with great pleasure your arrival in Paris and we welcome you.

We know that you are of that intellectual foreign elite that is, to be found in that worldly circle to which you belong so you will frequent the "TRETEAU FORTUNY" a new theatre of Art where the literary works of the whole world are performed.

We have decided to introduce into France Bernard Shaw the great Irish and dramatic author and we are sure that you will approve our idea.

We know that the new and audacious attempts have your approbation and that our realisations will have all your favor.

You will mix up with the fashionable "Tout Paris" and complete it, you will clap the great Suzanne Després and the splendid Troop of the "Tréteau Fortuny" in the "Profession de Madame Warren."

Bernard Shaw's fine play and you will contribute to our success by your presence.

THE TERRIBLE TRANSLATION 109

We know that you will wish to be among the first who interest themselves in forward literary movement.

Incidentally, the folder from which the foregoing gem was culled contained on its face the following lure: "On showing this ticket to the Control, the best seats will be given you without any increase in price," which handsome offer does suggest that the French, while still a little indifferent to the niceties of the English language, have picked up a notion or two of American business methods.

VIII

ANOTHER FOREIGN AUTHOR

THERE is a whole department of American dramatic criticism, as spoken in the universities and as written in the sedater journals, which is given over to a continuous lament over the present-day neglect of Shakspeare. The tone of this lament is querulous, as though the imperfections of the contemporary Shaksperian performances and the uncertainty of Shaksperian production as a commercial investment were directly traceable either to an incorrigible triviality in the American theater or to a certain essential baseness in its players and its playgoers. This is nonsense. As a matter of fact, everything of courage and invention and aspiration that has been contributed to the English-speaking theater in the last twenty-five years has tended to lead the players and their public away from Shakspeare. It is the best and not the worst in that theater which has come between him and the new playgoers of the twentieth century. Now, as never

ANOTHER FOREIGN AUTHOR 111

before, the difficulties which beset him in the theater are genuine and deep-rooted. In our time something has happened which has lent a real meaning to the phrase of a nonchalant Broadwayite who recently spoke of Shakspeare as "another foreign author."

To arrive at this not necessarily dispiriting conclusion, you turn your attention not merely to Shakspeare but to the audience itself. This has no reference, of course, to the precious crew which fills half the theater on nearly every New York first night under the pleasant delusion that it represents America, and can say thumbs up or down on each new play that passes by. Nor does it refer to the good people scattered over the country who go to the play once every three years. Leave out of consideration such special audiences, wistfully hungry for culture, as the roving outdoor companies may assemble from the summer schools and the multitudinous Chautauquas. Leave out of consideration all those who take their Shakspeare scrupulously, attending because they think they ought, and not for the beauty and splendor and fun there is in him. Take, rather, the great body of playgoers that are neither precious nor unappreciative; folks who read Edna Ferber and

Zona Gale, who admire Margaret Anglin and are not to be sneezed at; folks who attend the theater often enough to have some mental habit of play-going, who have had their taste in drama formed in our theater during the last twenty-five years, and more particularly during the present century. What of them? For it is to them we must look if Shakspeare is to flourish on the stage—and not merely, to his horror, in the library—in this, the fourth century since his death.

And between these people and his plays there has come a great gap, a breach that has widened rapidly in the last fifteen years. Merely to say that he has been dead three centuries is inadequately to express the idea. He had been dead nearly that long a quarter of a century ago; since then the span has doubled, trebled. Since then has come what may be called the modern drama, a complete, far-reaching revolution in dramatic art, the taking up of a new form and a new manner, the setting up of a new aim and a new ideal. The years in the theater since 1890 are long just as the nineteenth century was long in the history of civilization, change, achievement—far longer, the new historians relish pointing out, than the paleolithic age, say, which in mere time extended

rather longer than a hundred years. How radical has been this change you realize better when you consider that plays written in the sixties and seventies are more nearly contemporary with Shakspeare than "The Madras House," that incomplete work of genius which is more exasperatingly characteristic of its time than any play written in our day in the English language. And the best plays of to-day differ from Shakspeare as sharply as his own differed from the deathless tragedies which were written on the shores of the *Ægean* when all the world was young.

Inevitably the presentation of poetic drama in the age of the naturalistic play encounters difficulties akin to those which beset acting in the old Academy of Music in Philadelphia. Playgoers there may remember that in the days when a loose little band of stars was valiantly and somewhat melodramatically fighting the theatrical syndicate, that spacious barn was the only auditorium open to them. The ordinarily dimensioned stage properties would snuggle to the rear of the immense stage, and then between the place where castle or garden stopped and the place where the orchestra began there intervened a yawning apron, a disheartening expanse across which the players

✓ —in the argot of their profession—had to “put” the play. Mr. Hackett yelled through “The Crisis.” Miss Crossman must needs roar as *Rosalind*, and the great Mrs. Fiske—fancy it—Mrs. Fiske was obliged to reveal previously unsuspected lung power. This difficulty was not insuperable. It could be overcome, but the gap was there. And so it is now in the relations between Shakspeare and a present-day audience in our country. An unmistakable, though not necessarily permanent, separation has taken place that simply must be reckoned with in terms of illusion and response. The gap is not insuperable, but it is there. It is a commonplace of dramatic criticism that the actor of our time has not been trained to give Shakspeare. Any dramatic critic over the age of three can say that, and, in fact, does say it whenever he is out of copy. What is equally true, and rather more a matter of concern, is that the audience has not been trained to take Shakspeare.

The audiences have been trained away from Shakspeare, not by the machinations of base managers impressed with evidence more recent than Chatterton’s old cry that “Shakspeare spells ruin,” but by the finest and most brilliant work done in

the modern theater. They have been trained away by the playwrights, producers, and players of the naturalistic school, the men and women who try to represent their own day realistically, to put on the stage an action that has the form and color and sound, the authentic gesture and accent, of every-day life. Rebellion has reared its head in Germany. Atypical playwrights have spoken eloquently there and in Ireland and in Belgium, but the naturalistic school is none the less the determining force in the theater to-day. It may not be to-morrow, but that is another story.

The naturalistic school works quietly and with the fewest possible trappings. It speaks prose, and there is no poetry in it. It is the irony of fate that the Shakspeare tercentenary should have come around in a generation that could regard "The Old Wives' Tale" as its greatest English novel and in a year whereof the best poetry was much too much like the "Spoon River Anthology." The naturalistic school is typified in its conventions—chiefly the fourth-wall convention—those methods of procedure by which a produced play is conditioned, the terms of tacit agreement between playwright and playgoer which are in his mind and yours before ever the curtain rises.

"Let's pretend," he says as he puts pen to paper, and "Let's pretend" you say as you sidle to your seat. That is always the agreement between you, but the terms differ in different generations. Now you go into the theater assenting to the assumption that the fourth wall of a room has been withdrawn and that you are but an eavesdropper, made comfortable. Unconsciously, that is your habit. Hence all the occasion for bursts of dissatisfaction with the photographic, stenographic drama of the day. Hence the infinite detail of some of the earlier Belasco realism, with its suggestion that all he needed was a good, big moving-van. Hence the quiet, suppressed playing and all the subnormal acting that sneaks in under the fine name of restraint. Hence the actress who has occasionally been known to turn her back to the footlights and whisper her sentiments to the gratified back-drop in the fervor of her devotion to the missing fourth wall and its implicit denial of the audience's very existence.

And in all this there is no place for *Juliet* talking to the moon and *Hamlet* talking into space. There is no place for the majesty of blank verse and the lavish outpouring of sheer word music, no place for pageantry and impassioned mono-

logue. It is only in the freemasonry that exists between children and Barrie that *Peter Pan* can call across the footlights. The aside, like the soliloquy and the incidental music, is gone. It is gone not because it broke a rule, but because it broke the illusion.

And Shakspeare is difficult for one of our audiences because if you would go along with him at all you must go on quite different terms. It is all a matter of the audience's habitual predisposition, and there has never been a time since the days of Burbage and the old Globe Theater when the mental habits—not necessarily bad habits, mind you—of the playgoer offered such resistance to Shakspeare as they do to-day.

All this is no reflection of scholastic criticism. The fourth-wall convention has had its most potent effect on those who have never heard of it; it has conditioned the illusion even for the most remote and most naïve, the son, perhaps, of that splendid, if somewhat disconcertingly responsive, playgoer who assaulted *Armand* at the op'ry house in Denver when he went to see "Modjesky ez Cameel." The theater-goers of Utica, Akron, Des Moines, and points west are not so passionately devoted to the great Norwegian that they

cannot see what a good fellow our Will Shakspeare was. Nonsense. Ibsen has never had any direct influence on playgoers in English-speaking countries, but the great pioneer always reaches the lesser fellows of his craft. Not only Shaw and Galsworthy, but the most shameless little pot-boilers on Broadway write their pieces under circumstances Ibsen helped mightily to create. And thus accustomed, the average American pay-as-you-enter play-going audience now goes to the theater in a frame of mind that is radically different because Mr. Ibsen wrote. It is that frame of mind with which the plays of Shakspeare must contend.

So much for the audience. What of the actor? There is the oft-repeated lament that in these days there are no actors to play Shakspeare even if your thrifty producers could be persuaded to give his plays and the public nourished a secret passion to see them on the stage. But it is really understating the case to say that the twentieth century actor of the English-speaking stage has not been trained to play Shakspeare when the whole point is that he has been trained not to. By the stuff of which the present-day plays are made, by the implicit directions of the lines he

ANOTHER FOREIGN AUTHOR 119

speaks, by the atmosphere the best of the producers give to the plays they stage, by the standards that reputations set, and by your own applause and sympathy, he is trained to prose and to soft speech and to a quiet, homely, every-day naturalness that would ill comport with the superb verse, the magnificent declamations, the splendid trappings of the plays of Shakspeare.

"The eavesdropping convention," gloomily observes Henry Arthur Jones, "is developing a school of admirable realistic actors, who can render with extreme nicety all those subtleties of the drawing-room and the street which are scarcely worth rendering."

It seems probable that in the French Revolution many a simple, kindly, generous, socially-minded aristocrat perished on the guillotine. Certainly when the men of the theater rose against all the hollow and spurious romance of the nineteenth century they made it hard thereafter for true romance to get a hearing. They have left the theater one-sided, one-toned, limited, a little monotonous, and it is only a partial consolation to remember that while we see little now of Booth's Shaksperian repertoire, we see nothing at all of his "Richelieu." In the same way some-

thing of eloquence was killed in the war on grandiloquence and tall talking. Certainly when the swaggering, ranting actor, with all his sound and fury, went slinking out, there was discouraged something of the personal magnificence, the individual grandeur which is needed to fill the amaranthine robes of *Othello* and make the *Thane of Glamis* live,

You see, all the forces of the modern stage have been mercilessly dedicated to the repression of the actor. A will tell you—he will even write an essay about it from time to time—that this is the age of the great playwright and, therefore, in the cycle in which such forces move, no age for the great player. B—"wretched, meritorious B"—will prove to you that the incandescent lamp has done it all, that with electricity it is natural so to diffuse the light that the spot-light no longer hallows a single player at the expense of his fellows. It was an incorrigible greenroom wag who sent to another American star a marked wooden fragment of the now dismantled Wallack's so that he might forever keep and indulge his passion for the center of the stage. But, after all, not many of our players do; there are few left concerning whom this exquisite humor would have any point.

C comments on A and B by accounting for everything in the terms of the collapse of repertory. But they are all trying to explain the same thing, the dwindling of the player's stature, the new unpretentiousness which, for the great heroic rôles, ill transmits the glory that was Rehan and the grandeur that was Booth. All this was in the mind of the writer in "The London Times" who, when a great actress made her exit not long ago, said: "You feel that something of Shakspeare's secret died with Ada Rehan."

Of the fifteen Shakesperian plays these recent years have brought to town there were only two great performances—Forbes-Robertson's *Hamlet* and John Barrymore's *Gloster*—and but three examples of Shakspeare as a producer's contribution, leading off with the Barker production of "Midsummer Night's Dream," an eccentric presentation marked by the bewildering speed with which the players poured forth the incredibly abundant music of the text.

The simple folk out front, groundlings and gentry alike, said it was lovely and all that, but that they could n't understand a word that was said. "Gabbling" was the term used by the testier London reviewers when the same experiment was

tried on them, and Brother Barker, who had already raised his lament on the abandoned standard of beauty in the English language, on the falling off in the musical utterance of verse, responded chidingly:

"I call in question the evidence of mere policemen critics. I question a little their expertness of hearing, a little, too, their quickness of understanding Elizabethan English not at its easiest"—in other words, the loveliest Elizabethan poetry spoken by players untrained to speak it for the ears of men and women untrained to hear it.

And there you have it—or part of it. It is this and something more. Poetry comes strange from lips and to ears attuned to the most matter-of-fact prose. "Yes, I know, that is so." The dramas of rhetoric, fashioned for the platform, adjust themselves but awkwardly to the picture-frame stage of our time. "Very true, so they do." And naturally in an average audience of to-day there reappears the spiritual descendant of one who found the first *Lear* dull ("he's for a jig or a tale of bawdry or he sleeps"), the successor to silly Mr. Pepys, who found the "Dream" at the King's Theater "the most insipid, ridiculous play" he had ever seen.

But these are all only contributory elements in the decline of Shakspeare in terms of easy illusion, the spell of make-believe a great play can weave—and must weave—in the hearts of those to whom its story is unfolded. Every audience in the history of the theater, from the Athenians, who reveled in Euripides at the Temple of Dionysus, the mixed crew that jostled happily in the yard at the first theater in the parish of Shoreditch, the Londoners, who sat rapt at Drury Lane before the at least archeologically weird sisters in mittens, ruffs, and red stomachers who hovered over Garrick's caldron, down to the devoted army that besieges the box-office whenever the great Mr. Cohan writes a piece—all have gone to the play eager to pretend, hungry for reality, even the most calloused bringing to his seat remnants of that perfect faith the child gives in the nursery to the stirring story of *Cinderella* or *Snow-white*, to the pathetic incident of *Mother Hubbard*. They must recognize humanity in the story unfolded on the stage. They want to weep with the tragedy, laugh with the comedy, glow with the romance. They want to believe; they want to enjoy *themselves* in the theater. And the cheapest modern play, however hollow and spuri-

124 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

ous at heart, has at least the outward look and sound of every-day life which makes easy the pretense. Every development in the modern theater, not only in the drama, but in the structure of the buildings and the mechanism of the world behind the scenes, gives aid to the will and power to pretend. The imagination is subvened in the playhouse to-day. It has been pampered and Shakspeare is a strain upon it. There is the heart of the matter.

IX

THE CELEBRATED DECLINE OF THE DRAMA

THE most persistently recurrent phenomenon of the theater is the old playgoer who insists that the theater is in a state of decay. Just as George Jean Nathan, of "The Smart Set" and Budapest, is wont to admire any play produced at a spot sufficiently remote in geography to satisfy his craving for mere distance, so that twin spirit of his, the late William Winter, gave over his declining years to a fond admiration of any play produced in America so long before that no one could argue with him about it. Winter is gone, but others have rushed to catch up the torch as it fell from his hands. Indeed, the great Professor Copeland of Harvard tells me that he himself is the only old man extant who does not see a subsidence in the level of theatrical performance.

Says Brander Matthews of Morningside

Heights, in his wafer-thin volume of essays on acting:

When Colley Cibber asked Congreve why he did not write another comedy the old wit retorted promptly, "But where are your actors?" And Colley Cibber was one of a group of actors and actresses as brilliant and as accomplished as ever graced the stage in Great Britain. Sir Philip Sidney almost wept over the pitiful condition of the English drama, just before Shakespeare came forward with his swift succession of masterpieces. If we go back many centuries to Greece, we find Aristophanes lamenting the decay of dramatic literature as evidenced in the plays of Euripides. And when Thespis first started out with his cart—the earliest recorded attempt of any star-actor to go on the road with his own company—we may be certain that there were not lacking veteran playgoers who promptly foresaw the speedy decline of the drama.

Yes, and when George Henry Lewes, who, in addition to living in sin with George Eliot, wrote the best dramatic criticism which appeared in England in the fifties and sixties of the last century, lamented at so much a word the decay of the theater since his youth, he was looking fondly back to the very day when Dickens was sketching into "Nicholas Nickleby" the hasty but still recognizable portraits of *Mr. and Mrs. Curdle* who, in the thirties, used to infiltrate all discussion of the theater with their antiphonal chant: "The Drama is gone, perfectly gone."

CELEBRATED DECLINE OF DRAMA 127

Even so comparatively youthful a commentator as Arthur Hornblow, editor of "The Theatre Magazine," has wound up his fine, fat, two-volumed history of the American stage with a like note of melancholy—a melancholy he is able to maintain only by confining himself rigorously to a chronicle of acting, and pretending, for the sake of his argument, that the men who write the plays and the artists who adorn the stage are negligible factors in the scheme of the theater. Only by sedulously forgetting all about the Eugene O'Neills and the Robert Edmond Joneses of the present-day theater in America is it possible to exercise the cherished privilege of shedding tears over that theater's decline.

It is a sufficient commentary on the whole mass of elegiac poppycock that if a publisher were to issue an honestly compiled volume of the ten best American plays he would have to take ten written in the twentieth century. Certainly if he went back into the mauve dawn before 1880, he would come upon pieces now interesting only as relics. The most interesting one of all is "Fashion," Mrs. Mowatt's comedy of manners, which was presented to an astonished New York in 1845. It is interesting because it was the first American play

128 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

written by a woman, because it struck out along the path which the American playwrights have followed pretty steadily down through the Hoyt and Cohan farces to that happiest example of them all, "The First Year." It is also interesting because it was the first American play to leap the Atlantic to London. And because it was the first to express clearly that abiding conviction of the American playwright; viz., that all city-dwellers reek with sin, that the inhabitants of towns not over 10,000 are comparatively virtuous and that any one who lives in the middle of a ten-acre lot is as pure as the driven snow. Indeed, I am sure it was in "Fashion" that the scornful phrase "that city chap" made its first appearance on any stage. I have been unable to discover at what point in its history it acquired the additional words: "He ain't done right by our Nell."

"Fashion" was first presented at the old Park Theater three years before that celebrated playhouse burned to the ground. The comedy laughs at the parvenu Americans, much as *Martin Chuzzlewit* laughed at them. A *Mrs. Tiffany*, who once made up flashy hats and caps behind a little mahogany-colored counter in Canal Street and whose husband began his fortune as a ped-

CELEBRATED DECLINE OF DRAMA 129

dlar, emerges grandly as a New York hostess with a *jenny-says-quoi* about her and with some really very foreign exotics in her conservatory. Her efforts to marry her daughter to an ex-cook and valet posing in New York as a count are thwarted at last, partly by the intervention of good, old *Adam Trueman* from Cattaraugus County, who utters such fine, old, Man from Home sentiments that, in the event of a revival, it would be the least William Hodge and George M. Cohan could do to attend each performance and applaud him frantically. Even the sight of the darky footman in flaming livery afflicts him. "To make men wear the *badge of servitude* in a free land—that 's the fashion, is it?" You should hear him describe the despoiler of his daughter. "My heart misgave me the instant I laid eyes upon him—for he was a city chap, and not overfond of the truth." And you should hear his closing speech:

When justice is found only among lawyers—health among physicians—and patriotism among politicians, *then* may you say that there is no *nobility* where there are not titles! But we *have* Kings, Princes, and Nobles in abundance—of *Nature's stamp*, if not of *Fashion's*—we have honest men, warm hearted and brave, and we have women—gentle, fair, and true—to whom no *title* could add *nobility*.

This was the rôle which in later productions E. L. Davenport was to play both here and abroad, while *Gertrude*, the walking lady heroine, was occasionally assumed, with reluctance and disdain, by Mrs. Mowatt herself. For shortly after the first performance of the play she went on the stage and won there her greatest celebrity. No doubt it was partly because of this circumstance that "Fashion" found a hearing in all the principal cities of the country, as well as in London, where she was hailed as "the most interesting of young tragedians, the most ladylike of genteel comedians," and in Dublin, where she lived to hear the gallery gods roar down adoring salutations to her and where, you may be sure, the republican sentiments of honest *Trueman* were applauded to the echo. All this you may glean from her own ever-readable book, "The Autobiography of an Actress," within whose pages you learn to know and admire a woman who, in a hundred different ways, recalls that most charming heroine in English fiction—*Elizabeth Bennet*.

When Mrs. Mowatt died she was fondly and widely known on both sides of the Atlantic, but when "Fashion" was produced she was a woman of twenty-four who had written a little verse and

CELEBRATED DECLINE OF DRAMA 131

prose and given some public readings. Few knew the frail, beautiful, auburn-haired young woman who watched that performance from a box and who could not be dragged to the stage even on the night set aside for her benefit.

Indeed, she had some cause for trepidation. She had ventured on the comedy, she tells us, at the suggestion, and perhaps with the assistance, of one E. S. (possibly Epes Sargent), who had proposed it as a "fresh channel for the sarcastic ebullitions" with which she was constantly indulging her friends and who was himself the author of a now-forgotten tragedy called "Velasco." Certainly it was Epes Sargent who wrote the prologue for the first performance. The now all but vanished Puritan prejudice against the stage, the fear that any play coming from an American might be considered a presumption, and the redoubled fear because that American was a woman—all these trepidations appeared in that prologue, which was spoken by a gentleman who entered reading a newspaper. Here it is:

"*Fashion, a Comedy,* I'll go; but stay—
Now I read further, 't is a native play!
Bah! Homemade calicoes are well enough,
But homemade dramas *must* be stupid stuff.

132 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

Had it the *London* stamp, 't would do—but then
For plays we lack the manners and the men!"

Thus speaks one critic. Here another's creed:—

"*'Fashion!'* What's here? (*Reads.*) It never can
succeed!

What! from a woman's pen? It takes a man
To write a comedy—no woman can."

Well, Sir, and what say you, and why that frown?
His eyes uprolled, he lays the paper down:—
"Here, take," he says, "the unclean thing away!
'T is tainted with the notice of a play!"

But, Sir!—but, gentlemen!—you, Sir, who think
No comedy can flow from native ink,—
Are we such *perfect* monsters, or such *dull*,
That wit no traits for ridicule can cull?
Have we no foibles here to be redressed?
No vices gibbeted? no crimes confessed?
"But then a female hand can't lay the lash on!"
How know you that, Sir, when the theme is FASHION?

And now, come forth, thou man of sanctity!
How shall I venture a reply to thee?
The stage—what is it, though beneath thy ban,
But a daguerreotype of life and man?
Arraign poor human nature if you will,
But let the DRAMA have her mission still;
Let her, with honest purpose, still reflect
The faults which keen-eyed Satire may detect.
For there *be* men who fear not an hereafter,
Yet tremble at the hell of public laughter!

Friends, from these scoffers we appeal to you!
Condemn the false but, O, applaud the true.
Grant that *some* wit may grow on native soil,
And Art's fair fabric rise from woman's toil.
While we exhibit but to *reprehend*
The social vices, 't is for *you* to mend!

CELEBRATED DECLINE OF DRAMA 133

The Puritan prejudice is little more than a memory and the native dramatist is no longer abashed, but—"What! from a woman's pen?"—that surprise still lingers, and, if we are to believe Fanny Kemble, always will.

If "Fashion" seems archaic to us all to-day, it also seemed archaic in some respects to at least one of those who attended its triumphant première in the early spring of 1845. That was Poe, who, in the busiest and most fruitful year of his literary life, managed to devote a good many hours to Mrs. Mowatt's comedy and came to know the glow of having some of his suggestions incorporated in the production. Writing in "The Broadway Journal" for April 5—"Fashion" was produced early in the career of that short-lived periodical and the Park was but a step from its now obliterated offices in Beekman Street—Poe began:

So deeply have we felt interested in the question of "Fashion's" success or failure that we have been to see it every night since its first production; making careful note of its merits and defects as they were more and more distinctly developed in the gradually perfected representation of the play.

As to that success or failure, there was little doubt about it. The play was mounted in what

then seemed a lavish style, and in his first review Poe, who must have known his Vincent Crummies even if he did not know his David Belasco, voiced this prediction:

"We are really ashamed to record our deliberate opinion that if 'Fashion' succeed at all (and we think, upon the whole, that it will) it will owe the greater portion of its success to the very carpets, the very ottomans, the very chandeliers, and the very conservatories that gained so decided a popularity for that most inane and utterly despicable of all modern comedies—the 'London Assurance' of Boucicault." But a year later, in a paper in "Godey's Lady's Book," he was inclined to think that "much of this success itself is referable to the interest felt in her [Mrs. Mowatt] as a beautiful woman and an authoress."

But it was the lack of any evidences of a fresh start in the gradually quickening American drama that depressed and exasperated the critic of "The Broadway Journal."

"We presume," he said, "that not even the author of a plot such as this would be disposed to claim for it anything on the score of originality or invention. Had it, indeed, been designed as a burlesque upon the arrant conventionality of

CELEBRATED DECLINE OF DRAMA 135

stage incidents in general we should have regarded it as a palpable hit. It will no longer do to copy, even with absolute accuracy, the whole tone of even so ingenious and spirited a thing as the 'School for Scandal.' It was comparatively good in its day, but it would be positively bad at the present day, and imitations of it are inadmissible at any day."

How great would have been his pain and surprise could he have foreseen that the imitative "Fashion" would itself become the immediate forerunner and model for many and many a play and that it would recur under the name "Fixing Sister" as late in the history of American drama as the year of grace 1916. How greater still would have been his anguish could he have known that not for more than half a century would the playwrights learn to drop the asides and soliloquies which even then offended him sorely. For his reflections on those finally discarded conventions were cast as long ago as 1845 in his review of "Fashion." Even then he denounced as absurd "the rectangular crossings and recrossings of the *dramatis personae* on the stage; the coming forward to the footlights when anything of interest is to be told; the reading of private letters in

136 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

a loud rhetorical tone; the preposterous soliloquizing; and the even more preposterous 'asides.' Will our playwrights never learn, through the dictates of common sense, that an audience under no circumstances can or will be brought to conceive that what is sonorous in their own ears at a distance of fifty feet from the speaker cannot be heard by an actor at the distance of one or two? No person of common ingenuity will be willing to admit that even a most intricate dramatic narrative could not be rendered intelligible without these monstrous inartisticalities. They are the relics of a day when men were content with but little of that true art whose nature they imperfectly understood and are now retained solely through that supine spirit of imitation which grows out of the drama itself as the chief of the imitative arts."

And that was nearly eighty years ago.

X

PRESENTING "FOGG'S FERRY"

SPEAKING of the celebrated decline of the drama, it is possible to derive considerable comfort and now and again a little entertainment from reading the plays which attained some measure of popularity and approval in the seventies and eighties—the days when maidens glowed over "St. Elmo" and all Americans wept bitterly at "Hazel Kirke." Turn back to the shriveling pages of the New York dailies for May 15, 1882. The amusement columns of that day carried this announcement:

First Appearance of the Charming Young Comédienne
MISS MINNIE MADDERN

as

CHIP

in

FOGG'S FERRY

Charles E. Callahan's romantic comedy-drama of human
love and passion.

Illustrated by a strong company with picturesque scenery
and magnificent effects.

"Fogg's Ferry" vanished long ago into the limbo of forgotten plays, but I have read it with much pleasure. The heroine, *Chip*, is a red-headed minx of the sort that Lotta used to play. Miss Maddern enacted the rôle with a good deal of red stocking. *Chip* dwells at the river's edge with *Fogg*, the ferryman, whom she supposes to be her father. The suspicion that she is of aristocratic birth, that she is one of those countless heroines who never fail to be smuggled away in infancy, is broached at the end of Act I in the following touching scene:

Mrs. FOGG [*angrily*]. Chip can do as she likes for all me.

RAWDON [*the villain, who has been pursuing CHIP*]. Yes, you old hag, Chip can do as she likes! You are not her mother.

Mrs. FOGG [*staggered, but rallying*]. It—it's a big lie. Talk's cheap. Who minds what you say?

CHIP. I do. [*Crosses down before resuming*]. I am sixteen years old to-day. I'm no longer a child. And Mammy, if you are Mammy, I'm going to leave the old ferry, leave forever. I know I'm a wild, rough girl, with raising not the best, but I love the old place, love it because it's been *home*. I will still call you mother until I have better knowledge that you are not than Mr. Rawdon's word. You've been a little hard on me at times, but I forgive it all now, and I can't leave you without a tear. Mr. Rawdon, I don't want even you to think badly of me. I know I'm not a lady, and you don't think me one, but I never yet told a false-

PRESENTING "FOGG'S FERRY" 139

hood, or did a mean thing, and I reckon that will count. You called me a lady, spite of my rough ways. Now that we come to part, show me you meant it. Tell me, tell me, Mr. Rawdon, if it's only by a sign, you think I'm a lady! [RAWDON *hesitates*, WHITE *advances on him threateningly*, RAWDON *finally raises his hat slightly and bows*. WHITE *removes hat, bowing*. MRS. FOGG *stares bewildered*. Enter Fogg from house and takes off hat.] PICTURE.

In the second act of "Fogg's Ferry," *Chip* has been imported as a sort of demi-servant, demi-protégé in the household of a wealthy gentleman, who, of course, turns out later to be her father. Meanwhile, the spurious daughter, *Blanche*, treats her with proper scorn. *Blanche* is that kind. Says *Blanche*: "You think that a pretty home in this monotonous country should satisfy. It does not. I want action, society, amusement, the *world*. Farm-hands and milk-maids—I rank them below my horse." You can further savor *Blanche's* character and social style by hearing her give one order. "You may take charge of this precious package," says *Blanche*, haughtily, "and have our man *Still* tell my maid *Martha* to leave it in my room." Whereat the shy and submissive *Chip* steps forward and offers to do the errand. *Blanche*, at this suggestion, registers, according to the author's suggestion, "a supercilious

140 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

look" and says: "I did not notice the presence of of a menial." Well, *Blanche* is betrothed to the handsome *Bruce Rawdon*, but *Rawdon*, suspecting that *Chip* is the real heiress, keeps wooing her on the side to be safe.

He even tries to frighten her by hinting at some dark secret which he holds over her. This dialogue follows:

CHIP. What do you know against me?

RAWDON. Enough to call the blush of shame to that speaking countenance.

CHIP. That is not true. If you assert that I have ever done or even thought a shameful act, Mr. Rawdon you—you lie.

RAWDON. Not you, personally. But disgrace often falls on the innocent. Questionable antecedents, for example. I could reveal something concerning you that would drive you from this house.

CHIP. And show unmanly cowardice. My life, Mr. Rawdon, has been low and hard. I am struggling to climb. I have done so. Now you would drive me back. Don't you feel noble, Bruce Rawdon, fighting a lone girl?

RAWDON. I am not quite a cur, Chip. Let us be friends, more than friends. I said I *could* harm you, not *would*.

CHIP. Then don't lower me with those I have come to value and cloud all my poor little sunshine. Mr. Rawdon, if you have such power, I implore you, do not use it.

RAWDON [*as CHIP falls on her knees*]. Don't kneel to me, little lady.

PRESENTING "FOGG'S FERRY" 141

BLANCHE [*entering at this juncture and enraged by the spectacle*]. What is my affianced husband doing with this girl? Why on your knees, my lady? Is he pouring into willing ears his blazing passion?

RAWDON [*aside*]. Damnation!

After a sequence of such contretemps, poor *Chip* is found at last, wandering disconsolate by the brim of the old river. "They all shun me," she murmurs to herself. "Why not end it all? Those dark waters leave no bloodstains. The swift current will carry me far away and none will know my fate." But, of course, she is intercepted in her plunge by *Gerald White*, the hero and predestined sweetheart of *Chip*. The following love-scene is worth preserving:

WHITE. *Chip*, rash child, what were you about to do?

CHIP. Go away, Mr. White. Do? End it all. I'll find peace beneath those waters. There's none for me here.

WHITE. Fie, *Chip*. Youth is the age for life, not death. You are discouraged and morbid and think the world contains no friend. I've been a thoughtless boy myself but this has ripened me into manhood. Trust me!

CHIP. *Gerald White*, you are a man that any girl would gladly trust. But I am snared, helpless, wretched. What is to become of me?

WHITE. First of all, wrap up in this coat. [*Offers coat.*] You are shivering.

142 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

CHIP. No, no, I'm not cold. Yes, I *am* cold, but not the way you think. Once when a little child, I was lost in a snowdrift and nearly frozen. But I am colder now. My heart is frozen.

WHITE. I didn't mean to speak yet, but this affair precipitates a crisis.

CHIP. What do you mean?

WHITE. Mean, Chip? You are to me hope, incentive, aspiration, my one dear lodestone to success. You must be my little wife. Promise.

CHIP. It would not do, Gerald White. Your good heart, your pity for a forlorn wretch, impels you to speak those words. You have a future—have prospects. I'd be but a clog. How could a gentleman like you link his destiny with an outcast like me? Leave me.

He does leave her, for a moment, and during that moment *Chip* learns that more villainy is afoot. Up the river is coming a steamboat with her benefactor aboard, also many valuables and, though she little guesses it, a document establishing her identity and her claim to a fortune. But in the path of the boat the dark plotters have placed a time bomb. *Chip*, with whom the departing *White* has left a revolver for her protection, cries out:

The steamboat is coming and they've put that thing in the channel to blow her up. Merciful Heaven, what can I do? If I could but reach it. Any shock would burst it and save the boat. But I can do nothing. Oh, Heavenly Father, am I to idle here while innocent lives are butchered? Ah, the pistol!

PRESENTING "FOGG'S FERRY" 143

So, as the villains rush at her (one of them, by the way, crying out, "Away, gal, or you'll be killed"), *Chip* leaps to the river's bank, fires at the bomb, explodes it, sees the great burst of smoke and flame, and then, as the curtain falls, swoons happily away at the sight of the boat sailing majestic and safe to the dock.

It was in such truck as "Fogg's Ferry" that Mrs. Fiske came to us in the first days of her stardom—she, who was later to play "Hannele" and "Tess" and "Rosmersholm," who was, all told, to be more completely identified with the loftier literature of the theater than any other American player of her time. It is a cheerful fact that in the theater a "Fogg's Ferry" will sometimes lead to a "Rosmersholm," which is why so many of us—players, playwrights, playgoers—keep on trying.

XI

EUGENE O'NEILL

THE most interesting playwright of the new generation in America is Eugene G. O'Neill. Short and long, experimental, a little undisciplined and exuberant, vigorous always and always somber, his plays have, by their own force, pushed their way up from the tentative little playhouses tucked away in Greenwich Village and have summoned imperiously the wider audiences of the pay-as-you-enter theater. Not one of them but has its blemishes that would catch the roving eye of any dramatic critic over the age of two. But they have stature, every one of them, and imagination and a little greatness. And they come stalking into the American theater like a Hardy novel following unexpectedly on a succession of tales by Hall Caine and Marie Corelli.

One observes among the scribes and Pharisees of the New York journals an itch to single out one of his works—"Beyond the Horizon," say, or }

"The Hairy Ape," or perhaps "The Emperor Jones"—as the Great American Play. That phrase has been flitting in and out of American criticism ever since the days when Walt Whitman was somewhat indignantly reviewing plays for "The Brooklyn Eagle" and Edgar Allan Poe, for lack of any great variety of theatrical fare, was going night after night to record the changes made in Anna Cora Mowatt's "Fashion" at the old Park Theater of the forties. When, after many years, William Vaughan Moody came out of the cloister with "The Great Divide" tucked under his arm, a false alarm went up and created for a little while the impression that the thing had been done at last. Nowadays we are all more disposed to recognize the Great American Play as the one which is to be written *next* year.

It can, however, be said of O'Neill that in his own equipment are to be found two factors, both of which, under the doctrine of chances, one would rather expect to find present in the equipment of the Great American Playwright. For one thing, he was born in the theater. Then he spent a part of his life in work and wandering so remote from it that he found a perspective on life and gained such knowledge of folks as they can never

(1)

(5)

gain whose feet know only the path that stretches from the stage-door to the Lambs' Club. You will find both factors present in the years of preparation which led up to the writing of "The First Year," the best comedy yet written by an American. You will find them both present in the years of preparation which led up to the writing of "Abraham Lincoln," the most interesting play which England has sent to America in ten years. (They are always saying of John Drinkwater that he went from an insurance clerk's stool to a poet's garret on his way to the theater. They forget to mention that his father was an actor and that young Drinkwater probably heard a good deal of blank verse and a bit of rhetoric in his nursery.) You will find both factors present in the stories of Varesi and of the younger Guitry, to catch at two names which happen to have their place on near-by pages.

The force of heredity does show itself again and again in the writing of plays, chiefly, I think, in a predisposition to the theater's peculiar idiom and in a happy, unchafing submission to its laws, of which the natural-born playwright is no more aware, as he pegs away, than you, while walking the streets of your town, are aware of how much

the law of gravitation is interfering with your personal liberty.

Eugene O'Neill, then, is the younger son of that fine Irish actor, the late James O'Neill, a stalwart of the Booth and Barrett days, who later took to the road at the head of his own company, making a large fortune through many seasons with the play of "Monte Cristo," and retiring at last to the considerable portion of the State of Connecticut which he had bought with that fortune. Eugene O'Neill was born in Chicago during one of those tours, and it is worth noting that the young advance man who, on that occasion, was sent hatless through the midnight streets of Chicago in quest of a doctor was the same George C. Tyler who, nearly thirty years later, was the first Broadway manager to buy an O'Neill play.

Since the establishment of O'Neill as a playwright, a little legend of wildness has grown up about his youth. It was known that he had gone in and out of Princeton with greater expedition than usually marks the sojourns at that university, and there was a persistent tale that he discovered the sea and all the incalculable part it was to play in his life by the abrupt but salutary process of being shanghaied. This, I am

148 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

told, is not true, but at all events he did become a seaman, did find himself and the world in many a far and motley port, and did come home at last to settle down on a lonely strip of New England coast, there to write play after play in which, now remote and murmurous, now close and harsh and insistent, you hear the music of the sea.

1

"BEYOND THE HORIZON"

There came to New York one afternoon early in 1920, as a tentative and hesitant candidate for whatever hospitality that capricious and somewhat harassed city might be moved to offer, a play which, for all its looseness and a certain high-and-mighty impracticability, was possessed of elements of greatness. This was "Beyond the Horizon," a vital and valid tragedy by Eugene G. O'Neill—a play that was as native as "Lightnin'" and which had the mood, the austerity, and, all in all, the stature of a novel by Thomas Hardy. Seldom had an American playwright written for our theater a piece half so good and true.

It was O'Neill's first long play to reach the

stage. It had been preceded by six or seven one-act pieces, produced at different times by one or another of the experimental theaters in the by-ways of New York, those oft-derided, semi-amateur companies which are serving one of their chief purposes in life when they thus aid and encourage the short trial flights of men like Eugene O'Neill.

"Beyond the Horizon" unfolds the tragedy of a young, farm-born dreamer, whose romantic mind and frail body yearn for the open sea, the swarming ports of the mysterious East, the beckoning world beyond the line of hills which shut in the acres of his home. By all that is in him, he is destined for a wanderer's life, but Fate, in wanton mood, tethers him to this little hill-cupped farm and watches coolly the misery and decay this means for all his house. You meet him first at this cross-roads of his life and see him take the wrong turning. To him, on the night before he is to set sail for a three years' cruise around the world, comes love in the form of a neighbor's daughter whom he and all his people had thought marked rather for his brother. Blinded by the flame kindled in that moment of her confession, he lightly foregoes all thought of the world be-

yond the horizon, plans to settle at once on the farm with his jubilant bride, and watches serenely enough while his heart-wrenched brother sets forth on the cruise that was to have been his—the bluff, unromantic brother who, irony of ironies, is a true son of the soil, born to do nothing but work its fields and sure to wither if uprooted.

Then you follow through the years the decay of that household, the tragedy of the misfit. You see the waning of love, the birth of disappointment, the corrosion of poverty and spite and disease. You watch the romance burn itself out to an ugly cinder. You see the woman grow drab and dull and sullen, and you see the man, wasted by the consumption another life might have avoided, crawl at last out of the hated house to die on the road he should have traveled, straining his eyes toward the hills he never crossed.

All this is told with sure dramatic instinct, clear understanding, and a certain quite unsentimental compassion. To an extent unfamiliar in our theater, this play seems alive. This is not merely because truth works within it nor because of the realness of its people. It is rather because of the visible growth and change that take place as the play unfolds. ✓

The aging of the people is evidenced by more than the mere graying at the temples and the change of clothes, those easy symbols by which the theater is wont to recognize, if at all, the flight of the years. In a hundred and one ways it is evidenced as well by the slow changing of character and the steady deterioration of the souls—a progression of the spirit which, by the way, asked great things of the actors, and, for the most part, asked not in vain. O'Neill paints his canvas with what Henley called "the exquisite chromatics of decay." You might almost say, then, that the play is alive because it follows the inexorable processes of death. Not since Arnold Bennett's "Old Wives' Tale" has any book or play given us quite so persuasively a sense of the passage of time.

We have in O'Neill evidence a-plenty of a predisposition for the dramatic that is as pronounced as the Barrymore inheritance. But we also have one who has lived so remote from the theater that he has been uncorrupted by the merely theatrical and has carried over into his own workshop not one of the worn stencils and battered properties which are the dust-covered accumulation of years.

The same remoteness, which so freshens the air

of his play, is probably responsible also for its considerable impracticability. He was an impractical playwright, for instance, who wrote into his play the character of a two-year-old girl and gave her two long scenes, with business to do and lines to speak. He might have known that the part would have to be given to a child disturbingly, almost comically older than the baby called for by the context.

↳ Certainly it was a quite impractical playwright who needlessly split each of his three acts into two scenes, one outside and one inside the Mayo farmhouse. It was natural enough for him to want to show the highroad of Robert Mayo's dreams, inevitable that he should itch to place one scene on the hilltop, with its almost protagonistic vista of the distant sea. ✓ But no essential purpose is served by these exteriors which could not have been served had they been unfolded within the farmhouse, without a break of any kind. ✓

Some of a novelist's luxuries must be foregone by a writer when he goes into the theater, and one of the lessons he must learn is that the ever illusion-dispelling process of dropping a curtain, releasing an audience, and shifting a scene is accepted twice and sometimes three times by a

modern audience without even an unrecognized resistance. But any further interruption works havoc with the spell. It may be reported here that, at the second performance, the third act was telescoped into a single scene, and it may be guessed that the play would not only be a better knit but a much more popular piece if the same violence were done the other acts when the piece is revived.

In the theater what you want and what you get are very different. A more shop-wise playwright would have known that for his exteriors, each of them but a portion of an act and therefore certain to be of a hasty and makeshift nature, he could scarcely count on so illusive and charming a vista, so persuasive a creation of the outdoors as can glorify a more leisurely scene. The conspicuously dinky expanses of nature provided for "Beyond the Horizon" must have been a good deal of a shock to O'Neill. The wrinkled skies, the portière-like trees, the clouds so close you were in momentary expectation that a scrub-lady would waddle on and wash them—these made doubly futile the dashes in and out of the Mayo farmhouse.

It is one thing for O'Neill to sit at his far-

away sea-coast study and dream a scene—another thing to find it provided for his play when the first curtain rises in New York. It is instructive to compare the unillusive setting for his first scene with the stage picture as he had imagined it and set it forth in his script:

A section of a country highway. The road runs diagonally from the left, forward, to the right, rear, and can be seen winding toward the horizon like a pale ribbon between the low, rolling hills with their freshly plowed fields clearly divided from each other, checker-board fashion, by the lines of stone walls and rough snake-fences.

The forward triangle, cut off by the road, is a section of a field, from the dark earth of which myriad bright-green blades of fall-sown rye are sprouting. A straggling line of piled rocks, too low to be called a wall, separates this field from the road.

To the rear of the road is a ditch with a sloping grassy bank on the far side. From the center of this an old, gnarled apple-tree, just budding into leaf, strains its twisted branches heavenward with despairing gestures, black against the pallor of distance. A snake-fence sidles grotesquely from left to right along the top of the bank, passing beneath the apple-tree.

The dreamy twilight of a day in May is just beginning. The horizon hills are still rimmed by a faint line of flame, and the sky above them is radiant with the dying flush of the sunset. This disappears gradually, and stars awake in the infinite, drowsily, one by one.

At the rise of the curtain, Robert Mayo is discovered sitting on the fence. . . .

What O'Neill actually found on the Morosco stage was what people usually get who cry for the moon—instead of sixpence.

There is no need now to expatiate on the details of the deeply satisfying performance given by the composite company assembled for those special matinées but there must be special mention of the gorgeous performance given by Louise Closser Hale as the semi-paralyzed mother-in-law who carps away at life from her wheel-chair and regards *Robert's* yearnings with about as much sympathy as that intensely local old lady who bought *David Copperfield's* caul, she whose motto in life was: "Let there be no meandering." It was worth going miles to see the way Mrs. Hale made that wheel-chair take a part in the play. She used it as Mrs. Fiske uses a fan or a lorgnette, something to brandish, something wherewith to bridle and emphasize a thought or point a bit of wit.

This cast for "Beyond the Horizon" was assembled from the two companies which in the evening devoted themselves to "For the Defense" and "The Storm." The success of the amalgam, which gave the producer almost as much freedom of choice as he needed, suggests that the double

156 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

theater is probably the best solution of the problem confronting the producer who is minded to create a repertory theater. While New York awaits the somewhat doubtful benefit of a repertory theater, it may be observed that much of the work expected of such an institution is being done by the modest institution known as the special matinée, which brought "The Yellow Jacket" to life again, and which, in "Beyond the Horizon," gave us one of the real plays of our time.

2

"THE EMPEROR JONES"

The Provincetown Players began their 1920-21 season in Macdougall Street with the impetus of a new play by the as yet unbridled Eugene O'Neill, an extraordinarily striking and dramatic study of panic fear which is called "The Emperor Jones." It reinforces the impression that for strength and originality he has no rival among the American writers for the stage. Though this new play of his was so clumsily produced that its presentation consisted largely of long, unventilated intermissions interspersed with fragmentary

scenes, it wove a most potent spell, thanks partly to the force and cunning of its author, thanks partly to the admirable playing of Charles S. Gilpin in a title rôle so predominant that the play is a little more than a dramatic monologue. His was an uncommonly powerful and imaginative performance, in several respects unsurpassed that season in New York. Mr. Gilpin is a negro.

The *Emperor Jones* is a burly darky from the States who has broken jail there and escaped as a stowaway to what the program describes as "a West Indian island not yet self-determined by white marines." There, thanks a good deal to the American business philosophy he had picked up as a half-preoccupied porter listening wide-eyed in the smoking-rooms of the Pullman cars back home, he is sufficiently bold, ingenious, and unscrupulous to make himself ruler within two years. He has moved unharmed among his sullen subjects by virtue of a legend of his invention that only a silver bullet could harm him—this part of the play, at least, was not Mr. O'Neill's invention—but now, when he has squeezed from his domain just about all the wealth it will yield, he suspects it would be well for him to take flight. As the play begins, the measured sound of a beat-

158 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

ing tom-tom in the hills gives warning that the natives are in conclave there, using all manner of incantations to work up their courage to the point of rebellion.

The hour of *Emperor Jones* has come, and nightfall finds him already at the edge of the distant forest, through whose trackless waste he knows a way to safety and freedom. He has food hidden there and, anyway, his revolver carries five bullets for his enemies and one of silver for himself in case he is ever really cornered.

It is a bold, self-reliant adventurer who strikes out into the jungle at sunset. It is a confused, broken, naked, half-crazed creature who, at dawn, stumbles blindly back to his starting-place, only to find the natives calmly waiting there to shoot him down with bullets they have been piously molding according to his own prescription.

The forest has broken him. Full of strange sounds and shadows, it conjures up visions of his own and his ancestral past. These haunt him, and at each crisis of fear he fires wildly into the darkness and goes crashing on through the underbrush, losing his way, wasting all his defense, signaling his path, and waking a thousand sinister echoes to work still more upon his terrible fear.

It begins with the rattle of invisible dice in the darkness, and then, as in a little clearing, he suddenly sees the squatting darky he had slain back home in a gamblers' squarrel. He plunges on, but only to find himself once more strangely caught in the old chain-gang, while the guard cracks that same whip whose stinging lash had goaded him to another murder. Then, as his fear quickens, the forest fills with old-fashioned people who stare at him and bid for him. They seem to be standing him on some sort of block. They examine his teeth, test his strength, flex his biceps. The scene yields only to the galley of a slave-ship, and his own cries of terror take up the rhythmic lamentation of his people. Finally, it is a race memory of old Congo fears which drives him shrieking back through the forest to the very clearing whence he had started and where now his death so complacently awaits him.

From first to last, through all the agonizing circle of his flight, he is followed by the dull beat, beat, beat of the tom-tom, ever nearer, ever faster, till it seems to be playing an ominous accompaniment to his mounting panic. The heightening effect of this device is much as you might imagine.

Through most of O'Neill's imaginings for the

stage there sound just such drum-beats of approaching disaster—now symbolized in something physical like that tom-tom which hounded the fleeing *Jones*, now merely something heard in the overtones of the play, as Robert Ingersoll, listening to Mrs. Fiske's "Tess," could hear the "ominous footfalls of Fate." In "The First Man" it was the coming of a baby. In "The Straw" it was the unhalting progress of tuberculosis, for it was characteristic of O'Neill to unfold one of his romances in a tuberculosis sanatorium and a sign of the new times that this play was not spurned by the so-called "commercial theater" but was lavishly staged in New York.

"The Emperor Jones" not only moved up to Broadway but toured the country all the next year. It owed its great appeal chiefly to its discovery in Gilpin of a really superb actor, a player of fine understanding, genuine emotional power, and an uncommonly beautiful voice. It is in the irony of things that for this authentic and conspicuous talent there is in existence no dramatic literature. Except for "The Emperor Jones," there is no first-rate play which has a negro rôle of Gilpin's stature, and there is not likely to be another unless his talent inspires one. While

"The Emperor Jones" was being written, Gilpin was running an elevator.

3

"THE HAIRY APE"

April, 1922, saw "The Hairy Ape" installed at the Plymouth. For the third time an O'Neill piece burst the seams of the little Provincetown Playhouse. Like "Diff'rent" and "The Emperor Jones," it reached Broadway by the Macdougall Street route. "The Hairy Ape," which the author dryly describes in his manuscript as "a comedy of ancient and modern life," is a brutal, startling, dismaying, and singularly vivid play, which will linger in the memory long after most of the stuff that season produced has faded out of mind.

The beginnings of it can be traced back to the days ten or eleven years before when O'Neill was an able seaman aboard one of the ships of the American Line and came to know a certain stoker on the same ship—a huge Liverpool Irishman, who drank enormously, relished nothing in all the world so much as a good knock-down-and-drag-out fight, and who had a mighty pride in his own

strength, a pride that gloried in the heat and exhaustion of the stoke-hole which would drop the weaklings and leave him roaring with mirth at the sight of them carried out. He was just such a specimen, therefore, as the *Yank Smith* on whose immense shoulders the ominous, nightmare events of "The Hairy Ape" press down like the crowding phantoms in some fantastic picture of Despair.

In the mutual snobbery of the liner, O'Neill as a seaman could hardly exchange confidences with the stoker, but they got to know each other ashore in the greater democracy of Johnny the Priest's saloon down in Fulton Street just around the corner from West—the same saloon, probably, through whose grimy windows the light filtered on the gaudy hair and cheerless face of *Anna Christie*. There, over his beer, O'Neill was free to contemplate the immense complacency of the Irishman and his glowing satisfaction with what most folks would have regarded as an unenviable rôle in the world. The memory of that satisfaction furnished a curious background for the news which drifted up from the water-front some years later—the tidings that one night, when the ship was plowing along in mid-Atlantic, the

big stoker had stolen up on deck and jumped overboard. Why? What had happened to shake that Gargantuan contentment? What had broken in and so disturbed a vast satisfaction with the world that the big fellow had been moved to leave it? O'Neill never heard if any one knew, but out of his own speculation there took shape at last the play called "The Hairy Ape."

It is a fantastic play in eight scenes. The earlier ones are laid aboard a liner streaking across the sea from New York to Liverpool. When you want a play of blinding contrasts, you can hardly do better than board one of these ships, which are floating microcosms of an inequitable world. Side by side, so close they can almost touch each other, are the very extremes of fortune—great poverty and great wealth; here squalor, there luxury; on the one hand toil as terrific as man ever planned for man, and on the other an empty and nonchalant leisure—side by side, so close they can almost touch each other. O'Neill is in quest of contrasts as sharp as ever any afforded by the gentry of Rome a-sprawl on the couches of ships sped along the Mediterranean by row on row of weary, back-bent galley-slaves. He catches at both pictures and shows them in swift

succession. First comes the cramped, dim-lit, crowded firemen's forecastle, packed with roaring sweating giants, glistening men stripped to the waists with mighty shoulders and low foreheads, motley men scooped up from all corners of the earth. It is their job to feed the furnaces and forge the heat that will drive the ship across the world. From their clamor you shift suddenly to the hurricane-deck, a gaily painted smoke-stack silhouetted against an incredibly blue sky, with no more smoke than just a ribbon of it to make an interesting composition out of the picture of that sky. The deck is spotless and sun-splashed and in one of the deck-chairs that have been drawn offishly into the turn of the promenade a foolish, bloodless girl lies toying with some ideas.

Down below Yank is bellowing his own. Let the weaklings, who can't breathe and swallow coal-dust, sigh, if they must, for the fresh air and the peace of the old sailing days. Granted that work in the stoke-hole is hell. He chants his credo:

Hell, sure! Dat's my favorite climate. I eat it up! It's me makes it roar. It's me makes it move. Sure, on'y for me everything stops. It all goes dead, get me? De noise and smoke and all de engines movin' de woild, dey stop. Dere ain't nothin' no more! Dat's what I'm

sayin'. Everything else dat makes de woild move, somp'n makes it move. It can't move without somp'n else, see? Den yuh get down to me. I'm at the bottom, get me? Dere ain't nothin' foither. I'm de end! I'm de start! I start somp'n and de woild moves. It—dat's me! De new dat's moidern de old. I'm de ting in coal dat makes it boin; I'm steam and oil for de engines; I'm de ting in noise dat makes you hear it; I'm smoke and express trains, and steamers and factory whistles; I'm de ting in gold dat makes it money! And I'm what makes iron into steel! Steel, dat stands for de whole ting! And I'm steel—steel—steel! I'm de muscle in steel, de punch behind it! *[As he says this he pounds with his fist against the steel bunk. All the men, roused to a pitch of frenzied self-glorification by his speech, do likewise. There is a deafening metallic roar through which YANK's voice can be heard bellowing.]* Slaves, hell! We run de whole woiks. We're it, get me! All de rich guys dat tink dey 're somp'n, dey ain't nothin'! Dey don't belong. But us guys, we're in de move, we're at de bottom, de whole ting is us, see? We belong!

To *Yank* then comes the girl, mincing down the companionway, guarded by solicitous ship's officers, a little flustered by her pouting, wilful determination to see how the other half lives. Into the very spot-light of the insatiable furnaces she trips, at a moment when the big stoker is roaring with rage at the imperious whistle of the engineer, when his little eyes are red with anger and his mouth is spewing out a Niagara of oaths and when his shovel is brandished like some

bludgeon in the hands of the Neanderthal Man. At that moment in walks the girl. Her face tells plainly enough that she has come suddenly on something monstrous and bestial and terrifying, a gorilla, perhaps—a hairy ape. She stands transfixed for a moment, staring open-mouthed. Then she faints. It is the world's first notice to *Yank* that he does n't belong.

The rest of the play is just his hurt, bewildered, furious effort to get even—to get at her, if he can, to rip her finery off her and to spit in her white, transparent face. Frustrated in that, he searches for others like her to mash them and trample them under foot. The buffetings which the unruffled world deals him in his pursuit of this revenge (with ever and always the phrase “hairy ape” spat at him as he flounders along) are all pictured by the play in short, stabbing scenes so distorted and so fantastic that “The Hairy Ape” takes on the bad dream accent and aspect of an ugly fable. That is why it seems the most natural of consequences that he should steal into the night-shrouded Zoo at last and acknowledge the gorilla as his brother, that he should open the cage and invite the gorilla to come out and join him in one last bout with an unfriendly world.

That is why in the final moment of the play you accept it as inevitable that the gorilla should crunch him to death in two gigantic, hairy arms and pitch him dying into the cage.


In this piece there are new evidences of O'Neill writing not in isolation, as had been his wont, but on the very stage where his work was to be played. The new play suggested a greater familiarity with the theater as an instrument, and, as all plays should be, was evidently worked out in collaboration with the artists who would make it visible and the actors who would give it body. And here, for once, was O'Neill writing with a disposition not to express all his thoughts in words, but to leave something to the players. And Louis Wolheim, who played the stoker, made a genuine contribution to "The Hairy Ape." Once he was a foot-ball player at Cornell, on whose gridiron he came honorably by the broken nose which was so useful a part of his make-up. Later he taught at Cornell and engineered in Mexico and finally sidled into the theater under the guidance of Lionel Barrymore. He did himself proud in his first important rôle.

For the adornment of his piece O'Neill dove deep into Bobby Jones's locker. Both the scene on

Blackwell's Island and the scene in the monkey-house were capital examples of inferential stage-setting. In the former you saw only the one cell and the one crouched prisoner behind its steel bars. But a jabbering chorus of many voices pitched words down out of the surrounding darkness and the very angle of the single cell started your imagination to constructing a hundred others, fading away into that darkness, row on row, tier on tier.

There were two especial strictures in the criticism which trailed after "The Hairy Ape" through the dailies and weeklies. One deplored the sudden fantastic note entering into the composition so late as the fifth scene. As a matter of fact, a sensitive ear would detect that note in the very first scene, with its regimented motion and its stylized laughter and its abstractions of thought. And in each succeeding scene. The notion that those earlier episodes aboard ship were naturalistically wrought was a curious illusion of the playgoer's mind, traceable probably to the squalor of the language and to the same confusion which was addling the lady, who, when asking whether such-and-such a current play was "realistic," replied, "Oh, no; it deals with very refined and pleasant people." >

The other stricture dealt with the oaths which flow in a steady cascade from the baffled and unhappy stoker. They were stigmatized as "inadequate." There is some justice in this, for now and again *Yank's* profanity mounts to a rather limp epithet, less rich and racy, certainly, than those which must have eased the feelings of the real *Yank*. They recall to mind an eloquent base-ball captain long ago in the sinful past of Hamilton College. He was hopping up and down expressing in vivid monosyllables his emotions about a certain error when, midway, he discovered the president standing benignly near. The captain's arms were spread, his face contorted, his eyes blazing. And from between his wild lips sped the words, "Good gracious!" Still, it must be admitted that a tolerable substitute idiom for stoke-hole speech is difficult to invent, as John Dos Passos found out when he came to write "Three Soldiers"—or at least when he came to read those parts of his manuscript his publishers had decided to print. And it ought to be recorded that the speech of "The Hairy Ape" is rougher talk than the American theater has heard in our time. As we sat listening to it, it is difficult to believe it was only five years before that one coarse epithet popping out in the climax of "Our



170 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

✓ **Betters**" seemed so extraordinarily bold and inspired fourteen articles on what the present-day stage was coming to. Evidently it was coming to "The Hairy Ape." My own dissatisfaction is rather with the language spoken on the hurricane-deck. Granted that it is meant to be small talk artificialized like filigree, still it suggests too much the way the duchesses talk in a scullery-maid's first novel.

XII

DEBURAU, PÈRE, AND GUITRY, FILS

SACHA GUITRY, himself an actor and the son of a greater one, had spent all his days in the theater writing and playing in gay, jaunty, mischievous trivial pieces, when, in the darkest days of the war, the doctors sentenced him to an early death, and he was smitten with a panicky desire to write such a piece as might live after him in the eternal repertoire of the French theater. So he vanished from Paris, and when he came back he carried under his arm the manuscript of his masterpiece. He had wrought a play around the two Deburaus, father and son, who, one after the other, as *Pierrots* incomparable, drew the gamins and the great folk of their Paris to the little Théâtre des Funambules in the heyday of French pantomime.

Looking back through the shifting veils of eighty years, he wrote him a tragi-comedy of disillusionment, a lonely and beautiful play which is an expression of the philosophy of the stage,

the credo of the actor, the sad-faced comedian's *apologia pro vita sua*. In spirited and occasionally magical *vers libre*, he poured forth this piece which in the list of those rare plays written not only by the theater and for the theater, but of the theater, is without a peer in the dramatic literature of his country and ours.

It was done into execrable English verse by Granville Barker and its New York première marked the début here as a star of Lionel Atwill, coming before us in such a rôle as Mansfield sought and coveted all the days of his crowded life, such a rôle as another Lionel might have envied him. The performance brought Atwill much applause and gave David Belasco no end of satisfaction. But, though it packed his theater from Christmas to June, it was so costly a venture that it lost him a king's ransom.

As a background for this play it is worth while turning the dusty pages of forgotten memoirs to know a little better some of the people who come to life in its scenes. Victor Hugo, Georges Sand, Alfred de Musset—these pass in the procession. But more important and less familiar are two—Jean-Gaspard Deburau himself and Marie Duplessis.

DEBURAU, PÈRE, GUITRY, FILS 173

The elder Deburau came out of Poland, one of a nomad tribe of acrobats, clowns, and tight-rope walkers, who more than a century ago journeyed afoot as far as Amiens in vain quest of some weirdly rumored inheritance. In the play, Guityry has him thinking of the past as one interminable wire stretched across Europe, on which he seems to see his family forever walking, walking, walking. Of the rest of this family there is no easy record, but in the thirties the boy separates out from this obscurity as the most famous of those great pantomimists who took the immigrant zany of the old Italian harlequinades and wrought in him a strange transmutation. With the breath of their spirit this spoiled darling of the moon became not merely *a* wise fool. He became the wise fool in all of us, became the spirit of his age, became Paris itself.

Only once did Deburau as *Pierrot* venture outside the little playhouse in the Boulevard du Temple. That was when his far-spreading fame led to his invitation to the Palais-Royal stage, where his failure with the fashionable folk was abysmal. Not of such stuff were the fond patrons of the Funambules, who were the gamins and grisettes of the quarter, mixed with the stray

cognoscenti who would understand. These sat enthralled before him till the day of his death, when his son Charles succeeded him in the great tradition.

Marie Duplessis was that pale, fragile, exquisite courtesan of Deburau's time, who was born of a poor laundress and who died at twenty and of whom a curious counterfeit fame has survived because, among the many youthful lovers that chance threw in her way, was one called Alexandre Dumas. After her death, while her grave in Montmartre Cemetery was still heaped with fresh camelias, some previously invisible relatives appeared suddenly on the scene and sold at public auction the beautiful tapestries and carvings and paintings which had filled her apartment opposite the Madeleine. There used to be a polite legend that among these Dumas, *filis*, found the memorabilia from which he wrought "La Dame aux Camélias," the famous mass of sentiment which was hawked about our theaters for so many decades under the monstrous name of "Camille; or, the Fate of a Coquette." But Henry Bidou (that distinguished writer on theaters and war), in his recent series of articles on the work of the younger Dumas, describes bluntly his youthful devotion

DEBURAU, PÈRE, GUITRY, FILS 175

to Marie Duplessis, tells of the eventual interference by the elder Dumas, of how the young lover received from his father a fund of twenty-five *louis* to make a suitable and soothing parting gift and was then packed off to Spain, whence he did not return until after his lady had died. It is thus one of the interesting aspects of "Deburau" that it calls for the appearance of Camille as the serene girl she was and not as Dumas disguised her, certainly not as one who could, by any stretch of the imagination, be embodied, as so often she has been, by bulky emotional actresses in their declining years.

Her reappearance in "Deburau" added a local interest to a curious paper on the Paris of its day which appeared in a contemporary issue of the "Mercure de France." It seems that when the author of "La Dame aux Camélias" died in 1896, that magazine held a symposium as to his merits among the younger French writers, who proved almost unanimous in the conviction that as a writer he was no great shakes. This verdict, very annoying as it was to the devoted boulevardiers, provoked from the "Figaro" a challenge to repeat the question after a calming and enlightening interval of twenty-five years. When

the twenty-five years were past, the "Mer-cure" regarded the present-day attitude toward the younger Dumas as so obviously adverse that a questionnaire was hardly worth the time and trouble. Which decision left space in the maga-zine for an elaborate historical essay by Johannes Gros on the last days of that pretty peasant girl from Normandy whose name was Alphonsine Plessis, who liked to call herself Marie Duplessis, and who after her death was immortalized, or at least made world-famous, under the name of *Marguerite Gautier* in the novel and play writ-ten by one of her lovers. In one of the most de-lightful books ever written—that tome of anony-mous reminiscence which appeared in the late eighties under the title of "An Englishman in Paris"—there is a considerable foot-note devoted to Marie, tracing her ancestry back through sev-eral generations of somewhat *macabre* amours in Normandy.

The kind of patient and enthusiastic scholar-ship, the kind of passion for the unimportant, wherewith Gros reconstructed that almost for-gotten and essentially insignificant courtesan as a scientist reconstructs a dinosaur from the most meager of osseous remains, recalls the earnest cul-

ture of the student at Halle who spent three years on a thesis about the use of the indefinite article in Edmund Spenser. It is amazing to follow the care with which every lover, every creditor, every portrait painter (there were, it might amuse you to know, two portraits by the Norman painter named Charles Chaplin), every jewel, every fan, every detail of death and interment have been pursued through the old journals, letters, *dossiers*, and archives of that day.

This interest but reflects the interest felt at the time and which was surprising enough even then—surprising certainly to one avid onlooker, Charles Dickens, who was then in Paris, and whose letters are full of the prevailing excitement. "For several days," he wrote the Comte d'Orsay, "all political, artistic and business questions have been dropped by the newspapers. Everything gives way to a much more important event, the romantic death of one of the glories of the demi-monde, the beautiful, the celebrated Marie Duplessis." You may be sure he attended the much-recorded sale of her effects, which scattered her possessions far and wide and even put under the hammer certain letters which escaped her own fireplace only to go up many years later

178 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

in the smoke of the San Francisco fire. Said Dickens:

"To see the general wonder and sorrow, you would have thought it concerned a hero or a Jeanne d'Arc. But the enthusiasm knew no bounds when Eugène Sue bought the courtesan's prayer book."

How much greater would his surprise have been had he known that the interest would flare up again eighty years later in a foreign land! Yet he himself could not help sharing that interest. Nor can we.

The first act of "Deburau" introduces a mute performance of "Marrchand d'Habits"—you might translate that as "Any Clo-o-thes?"—a pantomime to which *Pierrot* must play a rôle akin to that of *Matthias* in "The Bells." It is a night of painful agitation at the Funambules, for the players there have just glimpsed a copy of the "Journal des Débats" (the same journal, by the way, for which the aforesaid Monsieur Bidou is now dramatic critic) wherein *Deburau* is singled out among all the rest for adulation. At the stage-door are waiting certain impressionable ladies who would have words with him. But, as always in such cases, the frightened comedian contrives to talk of his little son and to show

DEBURAU, PÈRE, GUITRY, FILS 179

them his wife's portrait. He even tries to get rid of an embarrassing and anonymous floral tribute, utterly unaware that it is the timid offering of the old box-office woman. He is headed dutifully for home when, in the shadow beside the theater, he comes face to face with *Marie Duplessis*. They are marching off together arm in arm as the curtain falls.

THE SECOND ACT

The scene is a week later at *Marie's* apartment. *Deburau* has been a half-jubilant, half-remorseful visitor pretty frequently ever since. It is he who christens her as the Lady with the Camelias, a name she promptly adopts as something altogether chic and unusual. When he pays a duty visit home, only to find that his wife has run away, he starts joyfully back, with his bird-cage tucked under his arm, leading his ten-year-old son with one hand and his little dog with the other, bent on laying them all at *Marie's* feet and spending the rest of his days in her radiant company. But he finds her in the arms of a new lover, a handsome young fellow of her own age, and poor *Deburau* reads his sentence in her compassionate glance. Amid his startled apologies and

180 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

adieu, you see her trying to introduce them, and as the curtain falls you hear her saying:

"Jean-Gaspard Deburau—Monsieur Armand Duval."

THE THIRD ACT

The scene is seven years later in the garret where *Deburau* dwells with his son *Charles*, now a strapping fellow of seventeen. Poor *Deburau*, sick in spirit and half sick in body, has been absent these six months from the cast at the *Funambules*. It is the more disturbing, therefore, for him to learn that his son, who has always been his prompter and his most devoted audience, now aspires himself to play *Pierrot* and, with the callousness of youth, actually thinks of doing so under the name of *Deburau*. The elder puts his foot down hard, yet he knows uneasily that the boy has only to wait. It is crushing for the father to learn, too, that when, as he had daily hoped for seven years, *Marie* comes tripping in at last, she does so not as one keeping a tryst, but in the mood of a sympathetic Lady Bountiful, hoping to cheer him with her gay stories of how the bullying *Duval*, *père*, had tried vainly to take her *Armand* from her, and determined to smuggle in a doctor who shall patch up her dear old friend

DEBURAU, PÈRE, GUITRY, FILS 181

and so restore him to the stage. It is the unconscious doctor, quite unaware of his disconsolate patient's identity, who really administers the magic medicine. No drugs, no blood-letting, will put the sick man on his feet, the doctor says. He must get up and out, must see nature and color and music and paintings—at all of which prescription *Deburau* makes a wry face. Well, then, the theater. Whereat *Deburau* laughs grimly. The very thing, persists the doctor. He should go to the best physicians in the world, the actors who can banish care and awaken a cleansing, healing laughter. He could not do better than go to the Funambules. Why, there was there, or had been until a short time ago, a mighty healer called *Deburau*— That is enough. Small wonder that, as the third act curtain falls, the old comedian is reaching for his hat and starting back, much uplifted, to the stage he had deserted.

THE FOURTH ACT

The scene is that afternoon at the Funambules. *Deburau* is again on its stage, but, in the months of his retirement, something has gone out of him. He can no longer stir the old laughter and, knowing this, he falters and blunders till, like a doom,

182 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

the first hiss is heard in the auditorium—a hiss caught up and echoed till the uproar takes on the sound of a crowd trampling something underfoot. The comedian steps forward and lifts a shaking hand for silence. It is breathless when they realize that, after many years, he will try at last to speak, that they are there on the night when the long-muted voice of *Deburau* will be heard at the Funambules. He does open his mouth, but no word comes. Then he falls back upon the only language he knows, the eloquent speech of pantomime. In gestures he tells them how sick he has been, how sick he is, that he can no longer play for their delight, that this is his last appearance. He makes his excuses, speaks his farewell. As the tears streak down the now tragic white of his moon-face, he makes his last gesture, a kiss blown from the Funambules to the gamins of Paris. The curtain, by the chance of a breaking string, comes down like the knife of the guillotine. The curtain knew.

The silent audience disperses silently. In the empty hall a moment later the excited manager is busy with the new playbills for the night, but it is *Deburau* who comes to tell them they need not bother to change the name of the *Pierrot*. In

DEBURAU, PÈRE, GUITRY, FILS 183

what follows, you see him leading forth his son as his successor, himself volunteering to step into the prompter's place in order that, just as there had always been a little of his son in his own work, so now there should be a little of himself in the work of his son. From his box of colors and grease, he makes up the boy for the night's performance, the boy sitting with his back to you, while with flying fingers and with the other players gathering curiously about the engrossed two, *Deburau* turns over to his son, in a long and beautiful speech which will be famous, the secret, the spirit, the philosophy of his craft. He holds before the wide-eyed, consecrated boy the promised satisfaction that can come from hearty, care-banishing, brow-smoothing laughter. It is worth noting that this *apologia* for the rôle of the *loustic* in the regiment of life was spoken from Guity's stage in Paris by Guity himself in that black, anxious month of February, 1918, while Paris was gritting her teeth and waiting for the last great German drive.

When the speech is done and the boy turns round, you see he wears the white face and startled eyes of *Pierrot*. It is to such a one that the father, drawing him aside, whispers his last

counsel, his gospel of work and love, without either of which life is an empty thing. There is a final bustle of preparation as the exultant barker can be heard without, drumming up the audience for the night. "This way, ladies and gentlemen, this way! A new *Deburau*, a young *Deburau*, a handsome *Deburau*, a better *Deburau*!"—a pean that visibly annoys the dethroned king and worries not a little the heir apparent. The troubled boy goes to him in unutterable sympathy.

"It is not true!" he says. "Why, the man must be crazy!"

Deburau shakes his head.

"But, Father, how *could* I have your success in these rôles of yours?"

"Why not?" his father retorts with perhaps a little grimace of pain. "You never know. The public is so funny."

Then, as the orchestra breaks into a gay march and the first spectators drift in from the boulevards, the curtain falls on the play of "*Deburau*."

XIII

THE LEGEND OF "PETER PAN"

OUT of the Never Never Land, straight from the tree-tops where the fairies sleep at nights, there flew in through the high nursery window set at the back of the Empire stage in New York one clear November night the immortal boy who had run away from home the day that he was born. A welcome awaited him, and for a time it seemed as though there would be never a Christmas in New York without its "Peter Pan." It is not now among the probabilities that Maude Adams will ever again attempt the rôle which she made so peculiarly her own; and for a time the play is likely to gather dust, for it would be a reckless player who would venture soon among the clustering memories of those first performance. But down off the shelf pirates, Indians, crocodile, *Nan*, *Liza*, *Slightly*, *Nibs*, and all will climb again some day, and in the mists that shroud the seasons to come we see the shadow of no parting from *Peter Pan*.

Precious few plays written in the English language in the last fifty years are half so sure of a place in the theater of the twenty-first century as this airy fantasy by J. M. Barrie.

This interval would be a good time for some one who knows, actually to write out for all of us the history of that play, not in scraps of newspaper comment, now here, now there, this season, last season, next season, but rather in a book of its own—"The Legend of 'Peter Pan.'" Once upon a time Louis Evans Shipman, editor of "Life," did publish a diverting volume that chronicled the adventures of a play of his. Now, "D'Arcy of the Guards" was neither a real success nor a real failure, but just one of the little sillies that are not sure what they are. The history of "Peter Pan," however, will be an altogether happy story, working up from the strange days when, like the abandoned *Tinker Bell*, the play seemed to hang fearfully in the balance between life and death, down to its last revival and the story of the service its royalties gave behind the lines in France.

It was on the night of November 6, 1905, that "Peter Pan" was played for the first time in New York. It had been produced triumphantly in

THE LEGEND OF "PETER PAN" 187

London the year before, and quite a fever of expectancy awaited its coming to America. The arresting poster with its "Do you believe in fairies?" bedecked the bill-boards of Manhattan, and sleepy little messenger boys curled up in the corner of the Empire lobby waiting all night for the beginning of the box-office sale. But the news from the road was disheartening. Washington evidently did *not* believe in fairies, and Buffalo was cold to "Peter Pan." On the opening night in New York, a polite and baffled audience laughed and applauded loyally—but at disconcertingly wrong moments.

The author of "The Legend of 'Peter Pan'" —with whatever of reluctance or malice may color his disposition—must write one inexorable chapter devoted to the collapse of the New York reviewers. Some there were who responded gaily to the appeal of the play, but there were others who did not respond at all. Now listen to this oracle:

Mr. Barrie, in the excess of his facetiousness, has seen fit once more to mystify his audience, and if "Peter Pan" fails to be a prolonged success here, the blame must be laid entirely at his door. It is not only a mystery but a great disappointment . . . a conglomeration of balderdash, cheap melodrama and third-rate extra-

ganza. From the beginning of its second act, it invariably challenges comparison with plays like "The Wizard of Oz" and "Babes in Toyland," and it fails to show either the sense of fun or childhood which made both pieces a delight to children of all ages. . . . For an artist of Maude Adams's standing, this play seems like a waste of time. And incidentally, if "Peter Pan" is a play at all, it is a very bad one.

The most famous critic of them all, both a better and an older soldier, spoke half patronizingly of the piece and described it as a fantasy "that sometimes runs into puerility," while still another opined:

Although its novelty will doubtless catch the town, you might imagine, after the charm of its delightful first act has worn off, that Mr. Barrie had finished "A Midsummer Night's Dream" by getting up out of the wrong side of the dramatic bed.

It is amusing to remember that the first few enthusiasts who proselyted in the fortnight before the tide turned and the play began to win its way were regarded by some as pseudo-intellectuals, arrant poseurs, indeed, for all the world as though cheering for "Peter Pan" were like walking down Piccadilly with a tulip or a lily in your medieval hand.

"Where," asked one, "is the convincing spirit? Where is the illusion? Where is the seductive

THE LEGEND OF "PETER PAN" 189

charm to transport us away from this workaday world? 'Peter Pan' is diverting but is not satisfying."

Where indeed? But the severest rebuke that was administered to the playwright appeared in "a morning newspaper" and contained these bitter reflections:

"Peter Pan" is a riddle to which there is no answer; it baffled a large and typical Maude Adams house last night. . . . His [Barrie's] ideas of childlike simplicity are ludicrous. They seem to be the fancies of a disordered stomach. . . . With the best of intentions, it is quite impossible to see any artistic merit in "Peter Pan." Occasionally it suggested jim-jams but never the lucidity of mere dope. . . . It was a pity to see Miss Adams, with her delightful gifts, wasting herself on such drivel.

Well, the third-rate extravaganza celebrated its tenth anniversary with no signs of mortality; the fancies of a disordered stomach have rejoiced more than a thousand audiences in America. The *Smee*, the *Jukes*, and the *Captain Hook* among the unbelievers have been pushed into the sea, and on its tenth anniversary was it fancy that the sound the wind brought from the Empire was the crowing of *Peter* triumphant?

But the critics were not alone in their misconception of the play. Few, if any, read its rosy

future, and it is gravely to be doubted if Barrie himself dreamed at the start that his piece about the boy who would n't grow up would bring him more money than any other play he had ever written. This must be all set forth, of course, in the chapter on origins, where one page will tell how the play grew from a section of "The Little White Bird" (just as "A Kiss for Cinderella" grew later from another page) and where another will tell how he found the names. Wendy, for instance, was what Henley's little girl used to call Barrie in her sincere effort to call him "Friend." In the chapter on origins it must be told, too, how Barrie at first regarded "Peter Pan" as *Hook's* play. That is why he took it to His Majesty's before he took it to the Duke of York's. He had in his mind the vision of a pirate the like of which had never been seen on stage or quarter-deck, so he planned the rôle of *Hook* for Sir Herbert Tree.

"Barrie has gone out of his mind, Frohman," Tree said. "I am sorry to say it; but you ought to know it. He's just read me a play. He is going to read it to you, so I am warning you. I know I have not gone woozy in my mind, because I have tested myself since hearing the play; but

THE LEGEND OF "PETER PAN" 191

Barrie must be mad. He has written four acts all about fairies, children, and Indians running through the most incoherent story you ever listened to; and what do you suppose? The last act is to be set on top of trees."

And long afterward Tree, in becoming sackcloth and ashes, told at a dinner how he in after years would have to be known as the manager who had refused "Peter Pan," nor did it subtract from the pain of confession that it was misunderstood, and next day he had to explain he had scarcely been seeking to convey that it was the rôle of *Peter* for which Mr. Barrie had intended him.

Indeed, "Peter Pan" in London is already in its anecdotage. One of the best stories clinging to it is that which tells of the English player who had had some success in one of its rôles and who, on the eve of the annual revival, went to Barrie with the bold request that he be "featured" in the playbills. "And what would 'featuring' be?" asked Barrie, cautiously. Whereat the actor, growing expansive under this show of interest, explained in detail that, while scarcely hoping to be starred, he did aspire to have his name separated from the lesser folk of the com-

pany by a large, preliminary "AND." "AND?" said Barrie. "Why not BUT?"

There must follow an account of the Barrie manuscript which has never been published, the curious script with its striking contrasts, the most amazing flights of fancy, the most delicate gossamer of playful writing from charming Barrie, followed by the most prosaic and most mechanically exact of stage directions from canny Barrie, wherein is planned every detail of the immensely complicated machinery for putting "Peter Pan" upon the stage. Here would be printed the missing scene, Marooner's Rock or the Mermaid's Lagoon, a scene long omitted from the play as performed, but which would seem to have supplied to Frohman the "great adventure" line wherewith the little manager made his big exit from the stage.

Then there would have to be a chapter headed "The Professor's Love Story," for that would tell the tale of how Barrie came to be a playwright at all. That placid and extremely sentimental comedy, which first the late E. S. Willard and later George Arliss played in America, is not an especially good play and, what is more, not especially Barriesque in its twists or its flavor. It

THE LEGEND OF "PETER PAN" 193

was a comedy written by Barrie before he learned how (or found the courage) just to "play himself" in the theater. Just as Wilde, sauntering through the stage-door for the first time, unconsciously felt called upon to behave like other playwrights (Sardou in particular), so it did not occur to Barrie to let his fancy play over his own materials, to let his humor and pathos find expression in any other patterns than the conventional ones of the day, when the theater was still fragrant with "Sweet Lavender." Groping his way in the unaccustomed darkness back-stage, it was natural enough for him to try first to use the properties accumulated there. "The Importance of Being Earnest" was not Wilde's first play, nor his second; and in the same way Barrie, unlike Dunsany and Chesterton, did not immediately set to work to create his own properties, his own devices, his own idiom.

It was toward the close of 1892 that "The Professor's Love Story" was presented "for the first time on any stage," at the old Star Theater, which stood down at Thirteenth Street and Broadway, New York. How really long ago that was may best be suggested by turning to the yellowed files of "The Times" and noting in the head-lines of

its review of the play the discerning description of Barrie as "a dramatist of rare promise."

For "The Professor's Love Story" was timidly and laboriously contrived when the gentle Scot, a man of thirty, was a new-comer among the playwrights. Several times he had turned from the "Auld Licht Idyls" and the first chronicles of Thrums to try his hand at writing for the theater, but the results had not been encouraging and he had no great reputation of any sort when he finished his romance of *Professor Goodwillie* and set forth on his round of the actor-managers of the day. He had just emerged from what he likes to call his younger and happiest days, when whatever he got out of life he got by writing. Then a new chair or a new etching meant a new article to pay for it, and when the coveted thing arrived the piece that had made it possible was promptly pasted on the back. Barrie's name was no open sesame in those days, and had England been at war then he could not, out of his own pocket, have supported a single cot, let alone a complete hospital, in France. But that's telling.

With "The Professor's Love Story" under his arm, he went first to Irving, who was kind and let him read the play aloud. And though Irving

THE LEGEND OF "PETER PAN" 195

did not seem possessed to accept it, he did pave the way to John Hare with a letter of introduction. Hare was more forbidding and insisted on reading to himself the manuscript, which was engrossed in a mystical handwriting that only *Peter Pan* and *Tinker Bell* could have deciphered. Furthermore, on the plea that it made him nervous, Hare would not keep the agitated playwright at hand as an interpreter, but sternly banished him to the anteroom to await the verdict. He did not have to wait long, for the verdict came almost immediately. It came in the form of groans, roars, and imprecations from within, and there the startled Barrie found that the great Mr. Hare, utterly baffled by the handwriting, had sought relief for his emotions by hurling the script to the floor and leaping up and down upon it. After this depressing incident, Barrie had a fairer transcript of his comedy prepared, and took it to E. S. Willard. In the bottom of one of Willard's cavernous trunks, along with many other scripts by other men, it then set forth for America.

It was in 1920 that Barrie's cryptic handwriting suddenly became legible. Startled friends made anxious inquiry only to find that because of

an attack of neuritis in his right arm, he was learning to write with his left hand. Indeed, he wrote "Mary Rose" with his left hand and some say that accounted for it. But that is another story.

Willard, in the first four seasons of the nineties, played only in the United States, and it was in the last week of an engagement at the Star in December, 1892, that he produced "The Professor's Love Story." On the spur of the moment, and with no more than six rehearsals, it was pitched on in place of Tennyson's "The Cup." Willard, of course, was *Professor Goodwillie*. The *Lucy* was Marie Burroughs and *Lady Gilding* was a young and lustrous beauty named Maxine Elliott. By that time every one, even in America, had read or was reading Barrie's most celebrated novel, "The Little Minister," and an eager audience awaited his first play to reach New York. The sale was large though it was that nightmare of the managers' existence, the week before Christmas, in the days before the "Do your shopping early" slogan had taken the fine frenzy out of the season. The success on the first night was unmistakable, and during the curtain speech there was thunderous applause when Mr. Willard asked if he might cable to the author in England that his play had won the day.

THE LEGEND OF "PETER PAN" 197

If such a message was ever sent it must have gone astray, for the first tidings Barrie had of his play's reception, or, indeed, of its having been produced at all, came in the form of a friendly and exploratory note from a stranger in New York, one Charles Frohman, who felicitated him on "The Professor's Love Story," and inclosed, by way of introduction, the picture of a young and extremely insignificant actress, of whom he had hopes and for whom, he hoped, Mr. Barrie would some day write a play. That note was the beginning of the memorable friendship between Frohman and Barrie, and the picture was a photograph of Maude Adams. It was Barrie's first glimpse of the woman who in the years that lay ahead was to interpret for America, was to *be* for America his *Phæbe Throssell*, his *Leonora*, his *Maggie Wylie*, his *Babbie*, and his *Peter Pan*. That picture, the photograph of a young Maude Adams with a little round button of an 1892 hat insecurely perched on the top of her head, still stands on the mantel shelf in Barrie's study at 3 Adelphi Terrace, sharing that small altar with a portrait of *Margaret Ogilvie*, the original manuscript of Henley's "Invictus," and an unconscionable number of pipes.

By the time "Peter Pan" came along, Barrie

198 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

was known the world around, and yet even then the critics struggled feebly. What eluded their stiff calipers was doubtless that quality which the discerning John Corbin recognized at once, its dual mood of innocence and knowledge. You will go quite mad if you try to decide whether the play is for children or for grown-ups. You see, it's for both, with something in it for each. "Peter Pan" is not children at play, but an old man smiling—and smiling a little sadly—as he watches children at play.

And the children love it. There will have to be a chapter about the "Peter Pan" audiences, and you have never really seen the play if you have not attended a matinée. You must see the miniature playgoers straining in their seats, breaking the nurse's leash and swarming incontinently down the aisles. You must see them in the boxes, looking in the perfection of their faith, as if at any moment they might attempt to fly out across the auditorium. You must hear their often embarrassingly premature rally to the defense of *Tinker Bell* and hear the shout that occasionally threatens to break up the proceedings, as when a passionately interested *Michael* on the wrong side of the footlights cries out in friendly warning:

THE LEGEND OF "PETER PAN" 199

"Watch out, Peter, watch out! The old parrot's poisoned your medicine."

The historian must tell of the little folks waiting gravely at the stage-door to ask for thimbles, and maybe he will have access to the countless letters to *Peter* that have come in, heavy with pennies sent trustfully to buy a pinch of fairy dust, which is so necessary if you have forgotten how to fly.

But the dearest friends of *Peter Pan* are among the oldest living inhabitants. Austere jurists, battered rounders, famous editors and famous playwrights, slightly delirious poets and outwardly forbidding corporation presidents, these are in the ranks of the devoted. You simply cannot recognize a Peter Pantheist at sight, but when you find him reappearing at each engagement you can begin to guess his heart is in the right place..

It would be idle to pretend that everybody likes the play, but its own public is large and so shamelessly addicted to it that a dozen visits to the theater are as nothing. There are some of us who cannot hear the opening strains of the music, who cannot witness the first inordinately solemn appearance of the responsible *Liza*, without feeling an absurd desire to laugh and weep at the same

time, who cannot watch *Peter* take his silent stand on guard outside the house they built for *Wendy* without a sense of exaltation that warms the heart and sends us fair uplifted to our homes.

"The Legend of 'Peter Pan'" must have a whole section devoted to those who have played in it. There have been successive broods of children, some leaving in the spring quite perfect in their parts, but reappearing sheepish in the autumn, so grown up that there is no using them. There has been a line of adorable *Lizas*, one in particular who enslaved all the company and kept them busy between scenes devising blandishments to win her favor. There is the story of her part in a New England tour when some of the *Mayflower* descendants—we are, as *Peter* observes, nearly all of us descendants—who made a point of looking shocked when they trailed through the private car that carried the jolly "Peter Pan" company. The pirates were peacefully playing poker, and just to give the strangers something to be really scandalized about, they set little *Liza* at the table, piled some chips before her, and put into her hands a deal of cards at which she gazed with such intense gravity that the dear New Englanders had a delightful attack of the horrors.

THE LEGEND OF "PETER PAN" 201

There must be due account of the annual "Peter Pan" engagement at the Duke of York's and of the actresses—Nina Boucicault, Cissie Loftus, Georgette Cohan, and Pauline Chase—who have played *Peter* in London.

There must be one long chapter of which the heading will be simply "Maude Adams." The legend of "Peter Pan" is in part the story of the winsome woman who alone has played the part in America. Barrie and Maude Adams are twin spirits that have worked in charm for the pleasure of unnumbered thousands. His humor is her humor, and the rueful strain in the best of Barrie matched the little wistfulness which made so gentle the great gaiety of her playing.

And, because it was derived from the same source-book of all Barrieisms, "The Little White Bird," there would have to be a chapter set aside for some account of that even more delicate and wistful Barrie play, "A Kiss for Cinderella," which, like "Peter Pan," was played in America by Maude Adams and which, until he wrote "The Old Lady Shows Her Medals," was saddest of all his writings for the theater.

For those of us who at "Peter Pan" feel a certain unconquerable chokiness, which lasts until

Peter waves good-by from his house in the swaying tree-tops, it is difficult to weigh the pathos of "A Kiss for Cinderella." It seems to be compounded of one part laughter and three parts unshed tears. Its recipe is secret, but its source is unmistakable. If you stop to think about it, you cannot doubt for a moment that the little *Miss Thing* who pretends she is *Cinderella* is our old friend *Irene*, sometime Nursemaid Extraordinary to *David A*——, in the purlieus of Kensington Gardens.

Barrie's *Cinderella* is a little drudge whose name is *Jane* and who is vaguely and scornfully set down on the program as *Miss Thing*. She pretends she is *Cinderella* so that she may transform her bleak existence by the brave day-dreams that—luckily for her—are more real to her than life itself. She comes out of the slums of London—not far from Drury Lane, you wager—where, with her watering-can, she has carefully brought herself up. Her speech is cockney, but—in honor of Thrums—there is a Scotch forebear somewhere, for the fine Scotch words and phrases still stick to her like bits of egg-shell to a chicken. By day she does the cleaning in a studio building for one-and-seven a week. She could see her way clearer

THE LEGEND OF "PETER PAN" 203

if it were one-and-nine, but it is one-and-seven. By night she presides over a slum hostel of her own, a shanty Penny Friend which she calls Celeste et Cie., a shining name copied from some grand shop-window in Bond Street. There she will fit you or shave you or dose you for a penny, and there, in mysterious home-made cradles, she shelters four orphan babies. *Cinderella* is the sort to do her bit in war time, and all the hospitals had coldly declined her services as a nurse. She has a bluejacket's baby and a French baby, and a Belgian baby, and if you must know, a baby named *Gretchen* whom she vainly tries to pass off as a Swiss, but who bites the policeman and indulges in other forms of *Schrecklichkeit*, such as sticking out her tongue. *Cinderella* is a stout patriot and in panicky fear of arrest for concealing an alien, but *Gretchen* had been left over and she was the littlest of all. So she had no choice.

And there each night, after the penny customers have gone, she tells the children the story of *Cinderella* they all knew in their own nurseries, whatever their home and whatever their tongue. So thoroughly are they persuaded she *is Cinderella* that she feels desperately her powers of make-believe will be exhausted if she invite to the ball

does not come pretty soon. So, when the tired, underfed, feverish, valiant little drudge goes to sleep that night in the street while she is waiting for the fairy godmother that never comes, it is small wonder that her delirium transports her to the ball.

It is a wonderful dream and a wonderful ball, a scene of glory staged by *Cinderella's* imagination and limited only by the pathetic range of her experience. Everything is golden. On golden rocking-chairs the king and queen (from a dingy pack of cards) hold court and later dispense ice-cream in golden cones from a golden push-cart. It is not *Cinderella's* fault that when she wants to create a sumptuous largesse she can think of nothing more festive—heaven forgive us all—than a pompous and possibly political charity hand-out. You know where she caught those phrases which the king, in a surprising White-chapel accent, delivers benevolently from his throne:

My loyal subjects, all 'ail! I am as proud of you as you are of me. It gives me and my good lady much pleasure to see you 'ere by special invite, feasting at our expense. There is a paper bag for each, containing two sandwiches, buttered on both sides; a piece of cake, a hard-boiled egg, and an apple *or* banana.

THE LEGEND OF "PETER PAN" 205

Then comes *Cinderella*. The glory of her coming she had foreseen, and to the children on many a weary night described it all in words like these:

There are blasts on the trumpet and loud roars. Make way for the Lady Cinderella. That's what you're called at royal balls. Then loud huzzas is heard from outside from the excited popu-lace. For by this time the fame of my beauty has spread like wildfire through the streets and folks is hanging out at windows and climbing lamp-posts to catch a sight of me.

So it is she arrives in her dream. Then there is the contest with the rival beauties for the hand and heart of the prince (who strangely resembles *Our Policeman*). You may be sure she vanquishes them all, *Carmencita*, *Mona Lisa*, the *Duchess of Devonshire*, the *Girl with the Muff*, even Greuze's lovely girl with the broken pitcher, beauties all from the studio wall she had dusted that day. Fairer they may be, but have they perfect feet? And what are uppers without perfect feet? What, indeed?

So *Cinderella* and the prince are married by the bishop-penguin, and they are all dancing like street children to the music of the hurdy-gurdies when the stroke of midnight brings the dream to an end and *Cinderella* wakes in a hospital. An angel in streamers is standing there with a boiled

206 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

egg on a tray. *Cinderella* thinks at first it is the egg you always get with your tea in the workhouse the day before you die; but there is no workhouse for Barrie's *Cinderella*. Rather is she swamped by the attentions of the adoring convalescent Tommies, but she waits for *Our Policeman*. She has a letter from him which, in her poor opinion, is nothing less than a love-letter. See, he has said: "There are thirty-four policemen sitting in this room, but I would rather have you, my dear." And when he comes, this romantic policeman, and proposes (twice, at her request), she accepts him in radiant words she had composed and memorized in the dreary days when her only light was just the valiant hope that some day out of somewhere a prince would come along. It was a bit she had been "keeping handy"—bless her.

It is this valiant quality in *Cinderella* that wins us utterly. She is so preposterously gay and and perky in her "brave apparel of the very poor." She is so absurdly cheerful when she has no earthly business to be. It is this spiritual valiance—the essential thing in the play—that Miss Adams expressed to your heart's content. Others in the company—notably Norman Trevor (whose

THE LEGEND OF "PETER PAN" 207

performance was uncommonly fine), Morton Selten, and Robert Peyton Carter—were all you could ask, but in the hands of Maude Adams was the heart of the matter. Long ago the felicitous Arthur Ruhl wrote of "the dauntless frailty of Maude Adams." It is the dauntless frailty of *Cinderella* that almost breaks your heart.

Here once more is the unutterable pathos of those who have to imagine their happiness or go without. Barrie may have taken a leaf out of "The Poor Little Rich Girl" for his dream scene, but the idea of his play is the idea of that pensive comedy, "The Phantom Rival," and of that pitiful tragedy, "'Op-o'-my-Thumb," which Miss Adams played here and which, not by coincidence, was played in London by Hilda Trevelyan. "'Op-o'-my-Thumb," you remember, tells the story of the little laundry drudge who has a splendid romance with an imaginary lover which lasts until the guiltless lay-figure for this creation chances to cross her path and dispel the illusion. It is the end of her day-dreams. She can pretend no more, and you leave her huddled there under the laundry table, a tragic figure, sobbing bitterly. Things come about more happily for *Cinderella*.

Of course, *Cinderella* is maternal. In that she

208 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

is more thoroughly a Barrie heroine than *Babbie* herself. Rather does she belong with *Elspeth*, *Maggie Wylie*, *Wendy*, and *Irene*, sisters all of *Margaret Ogilvie*, who used to laugh till she wept because her wonderful son could not keep her out of his books. *Cinderella*, then, is one of the mothers of the world. She wants to take care of everybody. She is forever brushing the ashes off the artist in the studio. Her first impulse at the sight of that romantical policeman is to run. The next is to stay and clean his belt—with spit. She is intensely jealous of the Venus de Milo, for all her large feet, but she is inclined to be scornful of the theory that that marble lady ever held a baby in her arms.

"If I had lost my baby, I would n't have been found with that pleased look on my face, not in a thousand years," she avers.

The artist ventures that when her arms were broken, she might have had to drop the baby.

"She could have up with her knee and ketched it," says *Cinderella*.

So now you know why the knee of Venus is thrust forward. It is a characteristic Barrie touch, as characteristic as the hominess of *Cinderella*.

THE LEGEND OF "PETER PAN" 209

"You can't be with her many minutes," the artist swears, "before you begin thinking of your early days."

Small wonder then that *Our Policeman* is uneasy when he finds himself talking immediately of his childhood in Badgery, and no wonder at all that before the play is done he finds the heart of him crying out to walk with her by Badgery Water.

For that is the romance that comes at last to the little waif that first walked into Barrie's pages years ago in a volume of forgotten short stories, now hopelessly out of print. The first was an enchanting thing called "Two of Them" and the second was "The Inconsiderate Waiter," wherein, if memory serves, a little girl stood recklessly in the street beneath his club window and signaled to him that his waiter's wife was better that day and conveyed, by astonishingly graphic pantomime, the further information that she had eaten all the tapiocár.

"The Inconsiderate Waiter" became, in time, a chapter in "The Little White Bird," and *Irene*, disporting an outrageous bonnet Barrie had bought her in an off inoment, became *David's* nursemaid in Kensington Gardens. Read a page

or two and you can see how clearly she was the inspiration for "A Kiss for Cinderella":

As you shall see, I invented many stories for David, practising the telling of them by my fireside as if they were conjuring feats, while Irene knew only one, but she told it as never has any other fairy-tale been told in my hearing. It was the prettiest of them all, and was recited by the heroine.

"Why were the king and queen not at home?" David would ask her breathlessly.

"I suppose," said Irene, thinking it out, "they was away buying the victuals."

She always told the story gazing into vacancy, so that David thought it was really happening somewhere up the Broad Walk, and when she came to its great moments, her little bosom heaved. Never shall I forget the concentrated scorn with which the prince said to the sisters, "Neither of you ain't the one what wore the glass slipper."

"And then—and then—and then—" said Irene, not artistically, to increase the suspense, but because it was all so glorious to her.

"Tell me—tell me quick," cried David, though he knew the tale by heart.

"She sits down like," said Irene, trembling in second sight, "and she tries on the glass slipper; and it fits her to a T and then the prince, he cries in a ringing voice, 'This here is my true Love, Cinderella, what now I makes my lawful wedded wife.'"

Then she would come out of her dream and look round at the grandees of the Gardens with an extraordinary elation. "Her, as was only a kitchen drudge," she would say in a strange, soft voice and with shining eyes, "but was true and faithful in word and deed, such was her reward."

THE LEGEND OF "PETER PAN" 211

I am sure that, had the fairy godmother appeared just then and touched Irene with her wand, David would have been interested rather than astonished. As for myself, I believe I have surprised this little girl's secret. She knows there are no fairy godmothers nowadays, but she hopes that if she is always true and faithful she may some day turn into a lady in word and deed, like the mistress whom she adores.

It is a dead secret, a Drury Lane child's romance; but what an amount of heavy artillery will be brought to bear against it in this sad London of ours. Not so much chance for her, I suppose.

Good luck to you, Irene.

And good luck to *you, Cinderella*. Mr. Bodie is right. We can't be with you many minutes before we begin thinking of our early days.

XIV

IT WAS "TRILBY"

THERE may in time to come be another play that will cause the hubbub which "Trilby" stirred in America, the sense of expectancy and the general impression that any one who had not seen it the night before was at least planning to see it the next afternoon. It is probably true that "Within the Law" and "Peg o' My Heart" reached more audiences in the end, and it is certainly true that the dramatizer of "Trilby" received nothing like the \$750,000 which has already been paid in royalties to the author of "Peg." But in its simpler and less obstructed day the play made from Du Maurier's novel was simply prodigious. Certainly no such success was ever scored by a play so hastily, so unimaginatively, and so artlessly put together. For it was carried along not by its own strength, but like a cork on the wave of that unprecedented and since unequalled enthusiasm which was the portion of Du Maurier's fascinating story in America.

"Trilby" was a best-seller and something more. It was more than a favorite. It was a craze, an obsession. America was "Trilby" mad.

"There have been subsequent books which have far outstripped 'Trilby' in the matter of sales." Thus some one—doubtless Mr. Maurice himself—writing in "The Bookman" a year or so ago: "Yet when regarded from all points, the story, introducing *Miss O'Ferrall*, the *Three Musketeers of the Brush*, and the sinister *Svengali*, is the most complete literary success of any book written in the English language in the last quarter of a century."

When you realize how rarely you see a copy of the story on the casual book-shelf, how few the new-comers to the libraries and stalls who ever ask for "Trilby," it is hard to believe it was only twenty-five years ago that everybody was reading it—literally everybody. Small boys in knee-breeches devoured it; dear old ladies, who had never heard of the *Quartier Latin* in all their blessed days, pored over its pages with infinite relish. It was read and enjoyed by the critical and the uncritical. You heard its names and phrases on every side.

Svengali was then and is still the best known

character in modern English fiction—with the possible exception of *Sherlock Holmes*. And just as the great sleuth of Baker Street is a familiar name and figure even to our unhappy fellow-creatures who know nothing of a detective story's fascination, so *Svengali* and the other folk of "Trilby" were at least acquaintances of those who had never gone so far as to buy or borrow a copy of Du Maurier's book.

There was simply no escaping them. It was Trilby this and Trilby that. There were Trilby hats and of course there were Trilby shoes. Trios of young men rather liked the idea of so dressing and promenading arm in arm that passers-by on the avenue would catch a suggestion of the *Three Musketeers of the Brush*. "Trilby" was read aloud in drawing-rooms—to music. There were Trilby tableaux of painful memory. There were "songs and scenes" from "Trilby." This restaurant sold Trilby sausages, and that confectioner served his ice-cream from a mold that aspired to the lines of *Trilby's* left foot. Virginia Harned, the first actress to play the rôle anywhere, used to tell of finding on the menu one day no less a dish than pigs'-feet *à la Trilby*.

There were burlesques without end, from Her-

bert's "Trilby" at the Garrick, with a monstrous *Svengali* who could hypnotize even the table on which he afterward died like an overlarge and animated doily, to the "Twilbe" the art students gave at the Academy in Philadelphia in the days when such temporary Thespians as C. M. Williamson and Everett Shinn could be impressed—probably without much of a struggle—into the cast and the *Gecko* was Glackens (W. J.)

If you rushed for surcease to the circus, you found a *Trilby* riding bareback with a particularly venomous *Svengali* cracking the whip. Were you a patron of the Dime Museum in Eighth Avenue? Then you were asked to select and vote on the handsomest of "Twenty Trilbys—Twenty." There were sermons on "Trilby," and there is the actual record of a Trilby Coterie and Chowder Club, of which other detail than the name has passed mercifully into oblivion. Out in Denver some one tried desperately to make off with the play on the unsubstantial grounds that it was a mere adaptation of Nodier's old "Lutin d'Argail," and on the other side of Brooklyn Bridge, in the midst of a family discussion on the morals of "Trilby," a woman went so far as to break her husband's head.

Such was the vogue of a book that interested with its story, aroused curiosity by means of hypnotism, and fascinated with its engaging account of the Paris Du Maurier knew and loved, with its happy picture of the gay, brave camaraderie of the life in the rickety studio overlooking the Place St. Anatole des Arts. At the time there were those who predicted that the life of the book would be brief; there are those who say now that it has gone forever to the limbo of forgotten stories, along with "David Harum" and "Richard Carvel" and "Janice Meredith." But there are some of us who suspect that the future holds out for Du Maurier's most famous novel the promise of another life, though in some bosoms, I must admit, there seems to burn no ember of the old enthusiasm. I myself was all aglow one afternoon when I came upon the original scripts of "Trilby" and "Peter Ibbetson" in the manuscript-room of the Morgan Library, shelved there side by side with the portfolios which contain all the dear, remembered drawings their author did to illustrate them. I tried at once to recruit as a fellow-witness of these glories no less a person than Amy Lowell, who was delving enviously near by in some Keats manuscripts. "O Miss Lowell," I

.

said, "would n't it thrill you a little just to hold the manuscript of 'Trilby' in your hands?" "No," said Miss Lowell severely, "it would n't."

But when the book was new she was outweighed. "Trilby" possessed the country.

Riding on such a tide, Potter's dramatization could hardly have failed of success. And for a time—not a particularly long time—it knew enormous popularity. At one period there were no less than nine companies touring under one management.

The production was A. M. Palmer's. He had precious little faith in it and was quite disconsolate throughout the period of rehearsal. It is often told of Du Maurier that he himself had had no faith in his ability or chances as a novelist when, after a long and busy life as a draftsman, he turned his pen to the writing of stories. Indeed, he tried to give the plot of "Trilby" to Henry James, and even when the book was done he nonchalantly disposed of the dramatic rights for a consideration of £50. They were returned to him, however, as part of the generosity he experienced from the hands of his American publishers.

The success of his play was established at its first night. That was in Boston, and the first New

218 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

York performance followed within six weeks. The première was a box-office triumph. There was such a crowd that Beerbohm Tree had to be content with a gallery box, from which, doubtless, he almost fell in the abstraction of planning his own version of *Svengali's* death for the Haymarket. There was so much excitement that Virginia Harned made her first exit through a window instead of a door, thus treating an enraptured audience to the spectacle of her departure across the Latin Quarter house-tops. It was lots of fun.

There were some good names, by the way, in that cast Mr. Palmer assembled. Here it is as to the more important rôles:

<i>Taffy</i>	Burr McIntosh
<i>The Laird</i>	John Glendinning
<i>Little Billee</i>	Alfred Hickman
<i>Svengali</i>	Wilton Lackaye
<i>Gecko</i>	Robert Paton Gibbs
<i>Zou-Zou</i>	Leo Ditrichstein
<i>Trilby</i>	Virginia Harned
<i>Madame Vinard</i>	Mathilde Cottrelly

Zou-Zou was Mr. Ditrichstein's first conspicuous hit—the real beginning of an interesting career. The memory of his "Oh, la-la-la-la!" still clings to him. It was part of his part to bring

flowers to the dying *Trilby*, and when, after some weeks, he took to substituting for the florist's nightly boutonnière some blossoms cut from plants kept in his wilting dressing-room, they began gradually to deteriorate and finally, in the midst of *Trilby's* fourth-act pathos, Miss Harned whispered to him: "These are getting rottener every evening." It threatened to disrupt the performance and *Zou-Zou* still likes to tell of the night *Trilby* almost died of laughing instead of dying of heart disease and *Svengali*.

Beerbohm Tree did *Svengali* in London, and out of the incredible profits of that venture he built for himself His Majesty's Theater, the same great playhouse which, through the accidental circumstance that he had mistrustfully leased it to a play called "Mecca" on the eve of his death, bequeathed to his family an immense fortune, for all Tree's own prodigal and magnificent ways. The play became a tradition in the Tree family, and all his children give occasional evidences of having been brought up on it. I remember once when Delysia was singing "Malbrouck" in London I made conversation by saying to Viola Tree, "That was *Trilby's* song." It did not make very good conversation, for she answered coldly,

"No, it was n't," and in the ensuing discussion explained that she had played *Trilby* and ought to know. We wagered, I remember, a set of Henry James's letters on the question. I was firm and told her I could turn to the very page of the book on which, in scattered stanzas, the song unfolded. "Oh," said Miss Tree, a little taken aback, and I gathered that she meant thereby that she had forgotten there *was* a book before the play. I have yet to receive the Henry James letters.

In the first London cast Gerald Du Maurier, then a young actor in his third season on the stage, played *Gecko*. Tree was forever reviving it, as, I fancy, Lackaye would have done here had he, too, been an actor-manager, with his own say in the theater. Indeed, when a communistically organized company of actors assembled late in 1921 under the name of the National Players and invaded New York with the promise of a considerable repertory of plays, it was observed with some amusement that they elected to start off with "*Trilby*." Lackaye was a member of that company, and it required no vast amount of insight to imagine the first meeting of the National Players, the first tentative question, "Well, what shall we choose for our first play?" and a monoto-

nously recurrent vote cast by Lackaye for "Trilby" until at last every one broke down and consented.

But there have been magnificent revivals in America, too. Notably, there was a splendiferous revival in 1915 and also a brief one made at the New Amsterdam ten years before. Again Miss Harned as the *Trilby*, again Lackaye dying, head down, eyes popping, over the table. Again the cheers. The Palmer cast, as printed above, was left intact save that now the *Gecko* was E. W. Morrison and William Courtenay the *Little Billee*.

And this "Trilby" memorandum shall close with a memory of that revival of May, 1905, a reminder of a most amusing episode which came as a rich reward at the end of the big act. The curtain rose and fell, rose and fell, and then rose with that pause which means the curtain speech. It had been loudly but unspecifically demanded. Mr. Lackaye and Miss Harned started forward. There was an embarrassed hesitation, a pause, and the curtain fell. It rose again. Again, in response to the continued cries of "Speech, speech," each star made for the center of the stage. Each wavered uncertainly. There was a deferential dead-

222 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

lock. The curtain fell. It rose again, but this time Miss Harned gracefully stepped aside and Mr. Lackaye was left to say how kind, how very kind, every one had been. Which was true, but who shall ever say for whom those curtain calls were meant—whose curtain speech was wanted?

XV

"PALMY DAYS"

OF recent plays one which charmed and entertained me much more than it seemed to charm and entertain any one else was a fondly written comedy called "Palmy Days," which Augustus Thomas brought to New York like a voice out of the past. An account of it may not be out of place in these pages because it will serve to illustrate how much extra enjoyment may be derived just from poking about back-stage to see from what sources and by what accidents a play may chance to take its final form in New York. The story of "Palmy Days" does suggest how plays *happen* in our theater.

California in the raw and turbulent fifties, the Far West in the days of the vigilantes and of lonesome, swift-shooting men, grown rich and reckless with new struck pay-dirt, dusty saddle-bags, heavy with the winnings of last night's faro game, bloodhounds baying ominously up the trail, and the alkali desert, with its lone path marked by

wagon junk and bones—all this color and flavor of the Bret Harte stories was in "Palmy Days."

The scene is Lone Tree—not far, as the imagination flies, from Roaring Camp—and the story unfolds in *Mrs. Curley's* bar, which, considering the number of times they shoot up the bars at Arroya and Alta Vista and Red Gulch, is a regular scandal for its respectability. There the commanding figure in the community is a mighty miner with a patriarchal beard and a memory as full of quotations as "Hamlet," one *Cassius M. McBrayer*, known among all the folk of that trail as good old Kaintuck.

McBrayer, embodied with great skill and quite unrecognizable humanity by Wilton Lackaye, has the echoes of old greenrooms in all his speech and the memory of fine old bosom-beating actors in his every step and gesture. He had not really been an actor himself, but he had been Edwin Forrest's dresser and he used to tell the chuckling crowd in *Ma Curley's* bar that, though he had made only one appearance on the stage in all his life, on that single occasion he got more applause and more laughter and tears in a minute than Forrest ever got in an entire season. Handkerchiefs were waved at him. Fine ladies turned to men they

had never spoken to before and beat them on the back. Even an old wardrobe woman kissed him in the exhilaration of that great occasion.

That was when Forrest used him to enter *King Richard's* tent with the line: "A gentleman who says his name is Stanley awaits without." The stage-struck dresser went without his dinner to practise this exacting rôle and had it letter-perfect. But, when he came on, there was the dread Forrest glaring at him, there were the bewildering footlights, the people, the crowded dress-circle, and the gallery with white faces leaning out of it. He stammered, reeled, stuck, and all that came from his trembling lips, the automatic repetition of something he had had to say a thousand and one times to the amatory tragedian, was the priceless and telltale line: "There's a lady downstairs."

Shortly after that inauspicious début, young *McBrayer* had become convinced that Forrest was the father of the baby his wife was expecting. So out he cleared to roam the world and show up after many adventures as *Kaintuck* in *Lone Tree*. The first act of "Palmy Days" finds him part-owner of the richest claim on the trail, for he and his young pardner, *Davy Crockett Woodford*,

have struck pay dirt in the Metamora. It finds him rumbling and uneasy because *Davy* has gone mad for love of the *Cricket*.

The *Cricket* is the young star of a barn-storming troupe consisting of herself, her mother (a square-jawed tragedy queen), and her stepfather, the blackface banjo king, who vamps and revamps George Christy's stuff for the mining-camps of the new California. The *Cricket* is another Lotta, and as she dances the longhorns throw dust and hard money and watches at her feet just as later they were to throw their gold and their hearts at the feet of Lotta when the Far West was young.

It is a comically rude and primitive entertainment staged there on the improvised platform in *Ma Curley's* bar for the delectation of *Big Lil* and *Bud Farrell* and *Ledyenworth* and *Texas* and *Fargo Bill* and *One-eyed Conover* and all the rest; but while the *Cricket* is casting wistful eyes at handsome, moonstruck *Davy Woodford*, her mother, knowing they knocked them cold in Omaha and Kansas City, dreams of further triumphs in the East, in New York, even in London.

The climax comes when *Kaintuck*, bent on rescuing *Davy* from the toils of this painted creature, recognizes her as his own daughter—unmis-

takably his own daughter, for she is the living spit of *Susan Blackburn McBrayer*, his mother, whose portrait, painted on ivory by Stuart, is all he has clung to through the years. There follows, of course, a turbulent scene in the audience and then a scene of reunion behind the curtains. The tragedy queen has the vapors at once. "He's your damned father, dearie," she explains to the startled *Cricket*, and, protesting that they need n't ask her to read Dickens while sitting on a volcano, must needs be revived by a slug of whisky before she dare venture before her public with the death of *Little Nell*. Meanwhile the calls out front are all for a joint appearance of *Kaintuck* and the *Cricket*. *Kaintuck* is pushed on to the stage, promising to give the *Cricket* a recognizable cue for her entrance. From your vantage point behind the back-drop you can hear the old man preparing for her.

"Ye call me chief!" he thunders.

"My God," wails the tragedy queen. "he's going to give them 'Spartacus.'"

But he shifts in time to "There's a lady downstairs," and on the roar of appreciation which that evokes out front the curtain falls.

In this comedy, so neatly and simply put to-

228 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

gether, Augustus Thomas, with a skill and an affection not many of his brother playwrights could have brought to the task, catches for a few hours in the theater of to-day some of the stuff that used to be part of our national life, catches and holds for the younger generation some fast-fading memories of the America that was.

The play is so obviously authentic that it is worth while considering its origins and sources, a process rarely profitable in these days when, although the mimeograph press-sheet may say that the idea for "The Lizard Girl" came to Marmaduke Snooks as he was lounging at his shooting-lodge in the Adirondacks, you have reason to suspect that it really came to him when a manager telephoned to ask him how many hours it would take him to come downtown and naturalize a German comedy that had just arrived.

"Palmy Days" was born of a sketch produced at the Lambs' Gambol, which Arthur Hopkins directed. That sketch, based in turn on a short story dramatized by Edward Flammer, revealed Wilton Lackaye in a guise unfamiliar even to those who had known him long and seen him in many parts, from the speculator in "The Pit" to the venom-visaged *Svengali* in "Trilby." In this

sketch he was merely a flowing-bearded loungeur in a Western bar, a bibulous but chivalrous old duffer who radiated a certain wonderful kindness. Before the evening was gone and while Lackaye was still plucking tufts of his heroic beard from his startled face, Mr. Thomas had dropped up to his dressing-room to say, "Well done," and suggest ever so tentatively a play around this new characterization. "Palmy Days" grew from that, and within a year Mr. Lackaye was to come to town with the fine and striking portrait of *Kaintuck*.

Nothing of the original sketch was left save the astonishing Lackaye make-up and a single line of the text, a line inserted, incidentally, by Lackaye himself. It comes at the climax of the second act, when the baying dog tracks old *Kaintuck* to the saloon and the reckless *Farrell* has the drop on him. It is *Big Lil* who knocks up *Farrell's* gun and drags him away.

"In that case," says *Farrell* sententiously and with great scorn, "I bid you good evening."

To which bid *Kaintuck* replies with an elegantly imperturbable drawl:

"I sees your 'Good evening' and I raises you 'Au revoir.'"

So much for the origin of "Palmy Days." Its sources are manifold and fairly familiar. The Bret Harte background is unmistakable. You would know that the Bret Harte stories had been reread for "Palmy Days," but if you had watched the whole succession of Thomas plays you would also know that he really needed no fresh course in the author of "Tennessee's Pardner" and "The Outcasts of Poker Flat." The flavor of these stories has been in some of his earlier plays, and it was a passage from Bret Harte that echoed liked a dear refrain through the memorable scene in "The Witching Hour" when the *Judge*—was n't it Russ Whytal who played the part?—read over softly the quatrain:

The delicate odor of mignonette,
The ghost of a dead and gone bouquet,
Is all that tells of her story; yet
Could she think of a sweeter way?

Then there's the quoting actor. The old fellow of the theater, whose every-day speech is a patter of apt bits from old plays, is a familiar figure, a type that is passing. The young actor, whose career has consisted of eighteen motion-pictures and a perfectly corking performance for four years in and out of New York in "The Broken Chain"

can hardly be said to have a repertoire, indeed has never spoken a line worth remembering.

You may be sure that one of those strange sets of warped and coffee-stained books on "The Lives of Great Actors," such as you used to be able to pick up in the second-hand book-stores, would have furnished enough material to support the tradition of a heart-breaking Forrest which looms in the background of "Palmy Days." As for the incident of the "There's a lady downstairs" catastrophe, well, it actually happened with devastating effect in this very town some twenty years ago. The *Richard* stamping about his tent on that occasion was none other than the late Nat Goodwin.

And, of course, there is the inescapable suggestion of Lotta in the *Cricket*. Lotta's real name was Charlotte Crabtree and she was born in Grand Street seventy-two years ago, the daughter of an Englishman who kept a book-shop in Nassau Street, which was very likely in the thinly populated outskirts of the city in those days. Her professional beginnings were made as a child dancer out among the California miners at Laporte and Rabbit Valley, whither, presumably, her folks had gone in quest of the new-found gold that was

drawing every adventurous spirit to the Far West. The memory of a saucy minx dancing in some forgotten San Francisco museum while a fiddler played for dear life and the uplifted miners showered their gold at her feet, that is the memory of Lotta which survives in many a tale and which must have suggested the *Cricket* for "Palmy Days."

The dream of the Cricket's mother came true for Lotta, for the East, New York, even London, bore witness to her eventual triumph. Even London saw and liked her playing of the *Marchioness*, in a wild stage version of "The Old Curiosity Shop." Augustus Thomas used to see Lotta when her annual engagement in St. Louis was a great event. She was the forerunner of many a promising soubrette, and when young Minnie Madern, in very short skirts and an impish manner that went well with her red hair, toured the Far West of the eighties in preposterous melodramas, she was following a trail which Lotta had blazed for her.

They are fast friends now, Lotta and Mrs. Fiske, for, though the actress who once set many a heart a-thumping under the red shirts in the old California mining-camps has not been heard from

since her withdrawal from the stage about thirty years ago, she is living in sedate retirement in Boston.

There happened on the first night of "Palmy Days" one of those eleventh-hour assumptions of a difficult rôle—going on without rehearsal, astonished and delighted managers, five-year contracts, and all that sort of thing—which occasionally enliven the theater. Came the first night of the new Thomas comedy and there was no one to play the bloodhound who must come racing along the trail with lolloping tongue and simple earnestness, charge through the crowded bar, and pick *Kaintuck* out of the mob there.

The producer of "Palmy Days" was confronted with a problem. Just as it is difficult to find actors nowadays with any Shaksperian repertoire, so you can no longer send around the corner and get some talented stage-struck bloodhounds as you could in the days when there were *Elizas* to be pursued in countless productions. The bloodhound first engaged for "Palmy Days" became indisposed as rehearsals progressed. A mammoth mastiff, costly, purse-proud, and nonchalant, was hurriedly forwarded to Atlantic City for the première there. He sauntered on the stage with

such obvious indifference on the subject of *Kaintuck's* whereabouts, guilt, and aroma that Wilton Lackaye was appalled. "We'd better call him Atlantic City," said that outrageous punster, "because of his bored walk." Laughter by the lesser members of the company. Feeble laughter by the worried management.

Then, when the opening night came in New York, it was the playwright's own dog who saved the day, the stunning Belgian police-dog brought to him from the Army of Occupation by his son. This dog was a shaggy, affable, easily excited fellow named Luxembourg, after the duchy in which he joined Major Luke Thomas's outfit. Lux knew only one trick, but he knew that very well. When questioned as to the whereabouts of Mr. Thomas's hat, he would lift his beautiful head toward the heavens and howl till he found it. Then he shut up.

It was very easy. They hid him in a high dressing-room at the Playhouse. They gave *Kaintuck* Mr. Thomas's hat to hold. At the cue toward the end of the second act, Luke Thomas, crouching over the dog, whispered, "Where's that hat?" Faintly to the audience in the theater below came the sound of a dog hot on the scent. Nearer and

nearer came the treble of his baying. Then it sounded just outside *Ma Curley's* bar. Then into the crowded room he plunged, shoving this way and that, straight across to where *Kaintuck* lounged against the bar. The scene was saved.

XVI

MR. TINNEY

THIS is the story of Philadelphia's fastest embalmer and how he became a Broadway star. To be sure he was also a fire-engine driver of no mean attainments and for several summers he swanked about as chief life-guard on the Atlantic City beach next the steel pier. Then the war made a captain of him. But these were mere avocations. Twenty years ago he really was settled for life as an undertaker's assistant in a city that is extremely partial to funerals, when an inner urge, driven on by circumstances over which he had precious little control, turned him into a popular comedian. That is the tale to be told, and its hero is known to the parish register as Frank Aloysius Robert Tinney.

Most chronic playgoers know Tinney, his tricks and his marmers. For even if they have not seen him in the flesh, they have at least run into one or another of the several mimics who sustain life in the English music-halls and the American

vaudeville temples by giving imitations of him. They know how he comes shuffling out and announces trustingly that he is about to tell the story of the goat that had its nose cut off. With much pother and whispering, with grave and naïve conviction that the point of the jest is a momentous matter to be approached thoughtfully and, if any error creeps in, to be reapproached, he goes into audible consultation with the orchestra-leader. He spends several minutes instructing that contemptuous accomplice how to feed him with the right cue by asking: "But how does he smell?" Only the wretched fellow mixes things up by asking: "Dear, dear, how does the unhappy quadruped breathe?" So poor Tinney, who had hoped to shout "Rotten!" at the top of his lungs, is covered with confusion and beats a retreat by playing "Poet and Peasant" on the bagpipes.

When you thus find a fellow-citizen deriving an income comparable to that of the President of the United States by the simple process of telling bad jokes as badly as possible, you can't help speculating on the process by which he built up so strange a commodity. Of Tinney, certainly, you always wonder vaguely where he got his style, where he got his jokes, and where he got his shoes

238 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

—those monstrous and unbelievable shoon which leave so little room on the stage for any one else.

As to his style, it was an accident. Tinney was living with his folks in Philadelphia when, at the age of five, he somehow convinced his father that a stage career awaited him. In a church entertainment in their parish, he had, it is true, provoked the laughter of the audience. But this had been quite unintentional. Still, the memory of that laughter and applause hung around the Tinney *ménage*, and before long the youngster was assailed with burnt cork, thrust into starched white dresses, and sent forth to sing three times a day at Keith's old Bijou Theater in Eighth Street—a famous vaudeville house known to the natives as the Buy Joe.

Forty dollars a week was to be the salary; and by Saturday the management had magnificently decided that the new-comer, billed as Baby Frank Tinney, should be featured and furthermore that he had earned the right to appear only twice a day during his second week. Unfortunately Tinney, *père*, misinterpreted this tribute as an aspersion. "My kid's good enough, he is, to appear five times a day," quoth Tinney, *père*, a trifle truculent. And so, after one delirious week, the young artist

was snatched from the arms of Thespis and packed off to school.

However, he had smelled powder and grease-paint, and, just as Laurette Taylor in her childhood used to go the rounds of the church entertainments in Harlem, so Tinney and his brother did songs and dances and jokes at the parochial shindigs of their home town. This kept him in funds right up to the time when his father, in a burst of ambition, dragged him down off the fire-engine and sent him struggling to Jefferson Medical. There one day our hero heard that while it took four years and more to learn to be a doctor, it took only six months to learn to be an undertaker. To a simple and eager soul, there seemed to be no choice in the matter at all, and before long the thwarted minstrel was quite the life of many a wake on the banks of the Schuylkill.

He might have gone on this way indefinitely had not the manager of a minstrel show encountered him when, like the true Philadelphian he is, he was balmily taking the Saturday afternoon air on Chestnut Street. Was it true, the manager asked, that as a comedian, he was by way of being a scream? "I 'm good, I am," Tinney replied.

And in what vein, the manager asked, did the comedy flow?

"Well," the unembarrassed embalmer replied, "me and my brother, we got two jokes this season, we have. I say to him: 'Hey, there, I know what 'd stick you.' And he says, 'Do you?' and I say 'Yes,' and he says, 'What?' and I say 'A pin.' Then I say to him, I say, 'Say, I certainly am sorry I bought that wooden whistle.' And he says 'Are you?' and I say 'Yes,' and he says, 'Well, Frank, why are you sorry you bought the wooden whistle?' and I say 'Because it would n't whistle.' That 's our line this year," Tinney went on. "Of course they might not get it out on the road but it goes great here in the city."

"Well," said the manager reflectively, "I guess in my show we 'll just have you sing."

Yet after the minstrel show had struck out along the great highway, it so happened that one of the real comedians had the measles or fell through a manhole or something, and fate propelled Tinney into the center of the stage. He was in a panic. "What 's the matter of you?" asked the manager bitterly. "You claim you 're a comedian and now 's your chance."

But Tinney explained that, whereas he was

excruciatingly funny, he needed some one with him. He could n't work alone. "Well," said the manager carelessly, "fix it up with the orchestra-leader. I guess he can ask you the questions."

So Tinney labored to train the orchestra-leader as a foil and all went smoothly till the point of the wooden whistle wheeze, when Tinney was foiled indeed. For the orchestra-leader forgot his part and instead of asking helpfully: "Well, Frank, why are you sorry you bought the wooden whistle?" he merely said, "Oh, is that so?" or something equally discouraging.

For a moment the stars reeled in their courses while Tinney, staring anxiously across the foot-lights, protested: "Say you 're crabbing my act, you are. You had n't ought to of said that. You had ought to of said——" and thus went on to straighten the fellow out. Onlookers from the wings were horrified. "It 's twenty-three for him," said the end-man, in the snappy slang of the day. "Just listen to him." "Not at all," said the manager, who must have been a genius in his way, "just listen to the audience."

And, indeed, the audience was in such fits of laughter that the outraged orchestra-leader was

242 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

laboriously instructed that night never under any circumstances to give Tinney the right cue. From that day to this, Tinney has subsisted almost entirely on bad jokes gone wrong.

So it has happened that he never has needed a partner in the sense that Stone had Montgomery or that Fields had Weber. He has merely worked with whoever was handy. His foils have been every orchestra-leader from Los Angeles to Leicester Square, and he has also pressed into service such varied artists as Vernon Castle, Ethel Levey, and the old horse who toured with him in "Tickle Me."

The memoirs of this veteran actor—of the horse, that is—would make amusing literature. He doubtless made his *début* in "Mazeppa," and it is certain that for many seasons he raced with great virtuosity and artistic sincerity in "The Country Fair" and "Ben-Hur." Marilyn Miller danced on his broad and comfortable back in the circus scene of the 1919 "Follies," and then, just as he thought he was due for an honorable retirement from the stage, Tinney bought him. He was much the worse for wear, and his years were twenty-eight, but Tinney paid a thousand dollars for him because he was an artist. He was

not only very, very old, but, besides having a cracked hoof, was incorrigibly lazy, so that he had to be taken to and from the theater in a truck. He was just like a chorus-girl, Tinney complained, what with his elegant stable and his powder and paint and all. This ancient beast's main duty in life was to throw a fit eight times a week at the very suggestion of Tinney's mounting him. He was an amusing old comedian, but they do say the funniest part of "Tickle Me" was the scene the audience never saw. It was the affectionate exchange of badinage and insults between Tinney and his milk-white steed as they foregathered in the wings before going on.

Tinney, then, can pick up his partners wherever he happens to be, and no rehearsals are really necessary. I was deeply impressed with this fact one summer evening back in 1914 when a number of us were paying our respects to Ethel Levey in her dressing-room at the London Hippodrome. A frantic message came from the manager to the effect that Shirley Kellogg had unexpectedly "biffed off to the Continong" and that Tinney wanted Miss Levey to go on in her place with him in the restaurant scene. She sent back regretful word that she had never even seen it and could n't

very well go on without a single rehearsal. Which rejoinder brought Tinney in person.

"Why, Ethel," he said, in loud reproach, "you know you don't have to rehearse at all, you don't. I'll tell you everything to say and you just say it." Which sounded so easy that she gave a pat to her hair, a switch to her skirts and started for the stage. We raced around in front to find them already on. Tinney was saying: "Now, Ethel, let's do the joke about the peas. Come ahead, Miss Levey, stop laughing and we'll do the joke about the peas. You say you think my table manners are perfectly elegant and you ask me how I manage to keep my peas from rolling off my knife."

"Well, Frank," Miss Levey repeated dutifully, "how *do* you keep your peas from rolling off your knife?"

"Why, Ethel, that's easy, that is—I mix 'em up with my mashed potato."

And so it went for fifteen minutes. The last we saw of them, they were bowing hand in hand, with Tinney much affected and thanking every one for being so kind to him and Ethel and the children.

That's Tinney's style and that's where he found it. His shoes? Well, he inherited them

from a vaudeville monologist who had bought them thirty years before from an old darky in Alabama. They cost fifty cents. Tinney got them for nothing.

His jokes? He picks those up around town. When he feels a new show impending he sends for one of those Times Square scribblers who make their living by writing monologues and orders a new one from him. This he reads over and pronounces terrible. He then reads it to Willie Collier who makes suggestions while Tinney makes notes. It is next tried on Cohan. More suggestions and more notes. He then goes in despair to Tommy Gray, who puts in what Tinney calls the "nifties." As when he now glowers at the orchestra-leader and says: "You're like a man who wears a toupee—you're only kidding yourself," or again: "I ain't going to have more than three children, I ain't, because, look here, I read in an almanac that every fourth person born into the world is a Chinaman."

Yet with all this prayerful preparation, most of Tinney's fun just crops up fresh and unstudied as a result of the first impact between him and his audience. The biggest laugh that ever rewarded him shook the New Amsterdam Theater the open-

ing night of "Watch Your Step." That was a revue that had not one star but a constellation. The Castles, Brice and King, Sallie Fisher, Harry Kelly and his dog—these had all done their best tricks, but 10:30 had come and gone and there was no sign of Tinney. We had come to the conclusion that he was laid low on some bed of pain when, in the Palm Beach hotel scene, Vernon Castle called out: "Where's the hat-boy?" On rushed Tinney, breathless. As the welcome subsided, he could be heard explaining plaintively: "I've been sitting out there all blacked up since half-past seven waiting for that dirty bum to say: 'Where's the hat-boy?'" Whereupon, as the English newspapers say, laughter and applause.

XVII

THE "CHAUVE-SOURIS"

OUT of Russia by devious ways there came to us early in 1922 a jaunty and delightful entertainment, which, to avoid confusion, was called here by the name it used in Paris—the *Chauve-Souris*. It is a vagrant troupe of Russian singers and dancers and clowns who used to contribute to a midnight frolic they enjoyed giving behind closed doors after theater time at the little Bat Restaurant in Moscow. As long ago as 1908 the custom was inaugurated of opening those doors to the public on five nights of the week. And once every year, by way of wild dissipation, the master of their revels, this moon-faced Nikita Balieff from Armenia, would take them all up Petrograd way to play for the gentry of the Romanoff court. On those eventful excursions it seems unlikely that Balieff's dreams ever foresaw how within ten years (due to such remote causes as the intrigues of far-off chancelleries, a certain Prussian fellow's delusions of grandeur, and an

248 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

uncertain invisible force known as Pan-Slavism) he and his fellow-players would be singing their old songs and cracking their old jokes in a shiny new theater in Forty-ninth Street, New York.

Two stranded cockles from the sea of the revolution, left in Paris by its receding tide—behold them now, Balieff and his *gigantesque* partner Wavitch. By various ruses they succeeded at last in gathering about them enough of their old comrades to go back into the show business with their familiar repertoire. Here, perhaps, were two sinewy dancers who had come over to France during the war in that forlorn Russian contingent which floated hapless along the Western front. Or maybe three of the women who had escaped to Warsaw heard that good old Balieff was in Paris and trekked precariously across Germany to rejoin him. Or perhaps Wavitch, in his flight through Odessa and the Mediterranean cities, remembered an address in Constantinople that would serve to unearth two engaging comedians foregathered for the moment with the Turks. At all events, despite the great dispersion, Balieff managed to piece a troupe together, and in December of 1921 he took over the Théâtre Femina in the Avenue of the Elysian Fields. Because the French (the

same silly people who call a hat a *chapeau*) have a perverse way of referring to a bat as a bald mouse, he was obliged to name his little Bat Theater the *Chauve-Souris*. Paris adored the *Chauve-Souris*, flocking to it from early December till August.

It has since been described here as the sensation of Paris and London. It was hardly a sensation in London. Eventually six of its numbers enjoyed satisfactory acclaim in the music-halls, but Cochran's first effort to make the *Chauve-Souris* an English fad by charging a pound a seat for it at a special theater was rebuffed by the London playgoer. This is not surprising. The London playgoer is the fellow who could not be dragged to see "Heartbreak House" or "The Jest" or "John Ferguson" or "He Who Gets Slapped" or "Liliom." On the other hand, he went for a solid year to "The Voice From the Minaret." He went for two or three years to that darling of his heart, "Paddy, the Next Best Thing." A rum cove, the London playgoer. The rumor that he sniffed at the *Chauve-Souris* quite whetted the American appetite to see it.

The *Chauve-Souris* is a little baffling. It is difficult to describe it because the satisfactions it

gives are so varied and sometimes so impalpable. It is Russian vaudeville, but to say so is to apply a discolored word to it. The second wit of his time suggests as an appropriate variant that we call it vodkaville. It is hard to sum up in a word because two or three of its thirteen numbers are ordinary enough, while, on the other hand, two or three are at once precious and universal—as “Alice in Wonderland” is. Consider, for instance, that blessed march of the wooden soldiers, who drill with immense gravity to the measures of a dear old tune. Your great joy in them is blended of nursery memories and an adult admiration for the rare precision of their craftsmanship. Ring Lardner, Mrs. Fiske, and the little boy from next door could sit in a row before them and experience a common rapture. Their drill is an exquisite thing in that it is exquisitely done, just as “Le Spectre de la Rose” was an exquisite thing only when Nijinski and Lopokova danced it together. It is a perfect thing in the sense that “The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife” was perfect, as “The Roman Road” by Kenneth Grahame is perfect, as the Noctambule song in “Louise” is perfect when Diaz sings it.

Because it began informally, and because the

wily Balieff knows full well that its continued informality is the very breath of its nostrils, he works artfully to keep going, however far from Moscow, the same neighborly, haphazard, drop-in-for-a-moment atmosphere of the little restaurant back home. The Raymond Hitchcock of the *Chauve-Souris*, he stands in front of it and chats about it whimsically with the delighted audience—chats about it in a comic pitter-patter of recently acquired English which is so amateurish that it adds measurably to the gaiety of the proceedings. When the *Chauve-Souris* is in New York, it is great fun to go of a Tuesday afternoon, when the house is full of show-folks escaped from their own plays and hurrying at once to this odd adventure. Balieff (coached, one suspects, by his confederate, Morris Gest) discovers Doris Keane out front and makes obeisances to his new czarina. He rejoices audibly that Clare Sheridan has come for the second time and paid him the compliment of bringing her children with her. The audience begins to limber up and grow neighborly. Appeals for encores and explanations are showered down from the balcony in a dozen languages. Balieff's thin trickle of English dries up. He retreats to French and attempts a pow-wow with Lenore

Ulric in that language, but she protests that she does not know enough of it. The balcony insists on having that Tartar dance over again. Balieff vows it can't be done. He says so in Russian and appeals plaintively to Al Jolson to play interpreter. Master Jolson, who knows two words of Russian at the most, is not daunted by that circumstance. The dancer, he confides to the audience, can hardly repeat the number because he is already half-way down the street where he has a date with a Russian caviar. Balieff, who identifies the one word caviar and can't for the life of him see where that fitted in, escapes under cover of the laughter and announces the final number. It is, he explains, his own farewell apparition for the afternoon. Which little slip, together with Jolson's earnest effort to have him say "operation" instead, increases the playgoer's good humor and, grinning on his way out, it requires a distinct effort at repression on his part to keep from saying good-by to every one in the house.

You might get some notion of the *Chauve-Souris* of what it is and how it came here, if you would imagine an American revolution blowing all this present-day structure to smithereens and landing Elsie Janis, destitute but spunky, in

Buenos Aires. She might run into the fugitive Fred Stone on the street. He would have heard that two old-time dancers from his company were clogging for their board over in Valparaiso. And she might have news that Nora Bayes was singing in a cabaret up in Rio. There would be some good singers of spirituals, too, stranded in the Argentine who might be summoned. What would be easier than to collect these scattered bits of Broadway and start work on a little program of old songs and old steps? What more natural than that they should become a fad there and later find profit in touring as far as Tokio and Shanghai?

Or, perhaps it would be simpler just to suggest that all those playgoers who especially enjoyed "Peter Pan" and "The Yellow Jacket" and "Pierrot the Prodigal" would do well to look into this *Chauve-Souris* and see if it has not something to say to them.

XVIII

After a season in which nearly every heroine was ruined either just before the first act or at the climax of the third and, in particular, after seeing, in that one season, two plays by Zoë Akins in each of which the heroine kept being ruined and ruined and ruined, this hitherto blameless chronicler of the theater momentarily lost control of himself, went mad, and wrote the following play, which was produced for the first and last time on any stage at the Forty-ninth Street Theater in New York on April 30, 1922.

ZOWIE; OR, THE CURSE OF AN AKINS HEART

—a romanza in one act—

"Nor all your piety and wit"—From the Persian.

Scene—A Place in the heart of a great city.

Time—Pristemps, 1922.

Cast (as given at the world première,

April 30, 1922)

Marmaduke La Salle, a stomach specialist..

.....John Peter Toohey

Lady Friend of La Salle's.....Neysa McMein

Another Lady Friend of La Salle's.....

.....Louise Closser Hale

Dindo, a wandering bus-boy.....J. M. Kerrigan

Zhoolie Venable, a suppressed desire.....

.....Ruth Gillmore

Mortimer Van Loon, a decayed gentleman..

.....George S. Kaufman

Archibald Van Alstyne, a precisionist.....

.....Alexander Woolcott

Lemuel Pip, an old taxi-driver, who does *not*

appear.....Harold W. Ross

Off-stage Music by J. Heifetz

256 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

[*The rising curtain discloses a row of three chairs in what seems to be a Capitol Lunch. These are occupied by LA SALLE and his guests. LA SALLE is groaning from repletion, and the women are redding up their teeth after the repast.*]

LA SALLE. Well, we might as well be going. I can't eat any more. I'm already seventeen calories beyond the limit. [*Confidentially but audibly*] Got a lot of wind on the stomach as it is. [*To bus-boy*] Boy, just a minute.

DINDO [*who never can decide whether he is a darky waiter or a garçon from Marseilles or a faithful old Hindu servant*]. Whaddya want?

LA SALLE [*pointing out of the window*]. Who is that strangely wistful-looking woman getting out of that taxicab?

DINDO [*deciding, for the moment, to be Swiss*]. That, sir, is Zhoolie Venable. There are those of us who remember when she was the toast of the Riviera.

FIRST LADY FRIEND [*who is much interested but not very bright*]. The Shubert-Riviera?

DINDO [*ignoring her*]. Poor Marcel Schwob called her the lost laughter of an unfrocked priest.

THE CURSE OF AN AKINS HEART 257

LA SALLE. Well, I guess we must go now. That's about all the antecedent action, is n't it?

DINDO. Yes, sir.

LA SALLE. Any atmosphere to arrange?

DINDO. I think we have plenty, sir.

LA SALLE [*reluctant to leave*]. Don't want any fine language? What about a little reference to a strain of music that is hauntingly reminiscent? Or to the salvage of a wreckèd life? Or perhaps a little quotation out of Bartlett?

DINDO [*who has him there*]. As for instance?

LA SALLE. Well, my part seems to be just a feeder. [*Laughs heartily and, in high good humor, surrenders the center of the stage*]. Say, that was a nifty was n't it?

DINDO [*chuckling*]. It was damned good, if I may say so, sir.

LA SALLE. Here, let me have the checks.

[*Exeunt omnes, DINDO gathering up the remnants of the feast and clearing away. From without, apparently from the kitchen or the cashier's cage, float the strains of "Then You'll Remember Me." Enter ZHOOLIE. She is clad in a sumptuous evening gown, over which a sable cloak has been thrown carelessly. She wears a tiara, a rope of pearls and nine bracelets. She carries a glass of milk and no purse, but, for reasons never*

258 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

quite explained, a riding-crop swings from one wrist. She prudently lodges the glass of milk on the center chair-arm, and then strides up and down the restaurant in great emotion and, indeed, does not sit down until the music has run its course.]

ZHOOLIE. Oh, to be in England, now that Johnny Weaver is in New York!

[Enter DINDO.]

DINDO [*gruffly*]. The taxi-driver is outside and says do you want him to wait?

ZHOOLIE [*a little flurried*]. How life pursues one! Tell the fellow we shall meet again. [DINDO is so impressed by this that he bows out backward in the manner of a Hindu servant and only just succeeds in repressing an impulse to say, "Yes, sahib."]

[Enter VAN LOON, who seats himself at ZHOOLIE's left, sighs deeply, and begins to eat a sandwich. His teeth are well embedded when a little cry of recognition from her rivets him in that pose. As ZHOOLIE speaks, her manner becomes more and more palpitant and her voice grows preposterously like Ethel Barrymore's. But before she can speak at all he sees her absurd riding-crop.]

THE CURSE OF AN AKINS HEART 259

VAN LOON. Well, how 's crops?

ZHOOLIE. You!

VAN LOON [*desirous to please, but busy with his sandwich*]. I think so.

ZHOOLIE. To think of meeting you here!

VAN LOON. Let me see, you were——

ZHOOLIE. That night——

VAN LOON. That night at Chamonix——

ZHOOLIE. No! no! Yes! yes! At Chamounix. I see you now. You stood lithe and a little dear and splendid there by the Mer de Glace. Ever and always in my heart, silhouetted against an amethystine sky. Those dear, lesser skies of our triste yesterdays. [*Coughs apologetically and amused at her scatter-brained, VENABLE ways.*] I'm afraid I've forgotten your name.

VAN LOON. At Chamounix. Then you were—you must have been—she of whom all men dreamed. You were the next to the last of the Mad Varicks.

ZHOOLIE. I was the *last*! Only, this year, they're calling me the first of the Mad Venables.

VAN LOON [*beginning to expand*]. And I am——

ZHOOLIE [*gravely sweet in manner but not really interested in any one else's biography.*]

260 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

Dear friend, dear, dear old friend, does it matter? You and I—two plaintive notes in the overtones of the great symphony, two bits——

VAN LOON [*apprehensively*]. Two bits?

ZHOOLIE. Two bits of sorry driftwood, swirled together for yet another moment by some whimsical, some capricious, eddy.

VAN LOON [*cheerfully*]. Very good, eddy.

ZHOOLIE. What matter names? Let them call us what we really are—flotsam and jetsam.

VAN LOON [*dubiously*]. Sounds too much like a sister act.

ZHOOLIE. We may come to vaudeville yet. What is life but a great circuit. Your heart yearns for the Palace and——

VAN LOON. And Fate books you on Fox time. It's hell!

[*Enter VAN ALSTYNE, superb in crush-hat, opera cape, ivory-headed stick, white gloves, and carrying a glass of simple milk. He eyes VAN LOON disdainfully and takes the third seat. He is beginning to drink when arrested by another of ZHOOLIE's little cries of recognition.*]

ZHOOLIE. You!

VAN ALSTYNE. You!

ZHOOLIE. You!

THE CURSE OF AN AKINS HEART 261

VAN LOON [*in her ear*]. Was he one of us, too?

ZHOOLIE [*whispering back*]. I suppose so.

VAN ALSTYNE [*beginning to catch the spirit*]. That night——

VAN LOON [*to ZHOOLIE*]. Ah, he was one of us, all right.

ZHOOLIE [*a little amused*]. I never seem to have done anything in the daytime.

VAN ALSTYNE [*not to be deflected*]. That night on the Nevsky Prospect, with all great Russia's snows for our couch——

ZHOOLIE [*shivering*]. Was n't it Lake Como? Oh, say it was the Lago di Como. [*This cue is too much for the violin in the kitchen, which breaks into "O Sole Mio," of course.*]

VAN ALSTYNE [*stiffly*]. It was the Nevsky Prospect.

ZHOOLIE. Oh, say it was the Palazzo at Campo Santo, while the dear tawny boys with their eyes of jet—the lads from our own Napoli—sang beneath our balcony. And far out across a topaz bay came the first, frightened chill of another autumn.

VAN ALSTYNE [*impressed, but firm*]. It was the Nevsky Prospect.

262 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

VAN LOON [*a little annoyed at being left out of all this*]. How is the Prospect these days, anyhow?

DINDO [*in passing*]. Terrible.

VAN ALSTYNE. And now you have come to this.

ZHOOLIE [*cowering, heart-broken*]. No.

VAN ALSTYNE [*relentless*]. I find you here.

ZHOOLIE. No, no.

VAN ALSTYNE. I find you in this—this—Ah! how in our spinelessness we shun the words that sear and scald!—I find you in this—this—place.

ZHOOLIE [*clutching her riding-crop and lifting it to heaven*]. No! no! no!

VAN LOON [*in a spirit of helpfulness*]. She says not.

ZHOOLIE [*clasping her cloak around her*]. With such as we, there can be no tarrying. Let us be gone.

DINDO. Can I get you anything, Madame Zhoolie?

ZHOOLIE. You, too?

DINDO. I, too, Madame Zhoolie.

ZHOOLIE [*losing track a little*]. Was it—could it have been—Barcelona? That night—

DINDO. It was in Cairo, eight years ago come All Souls' eve.

THE CURSE OF AN AKINS HEART 263

ZHOOLIE. We met at——

DINDO. It was in the Selig Effendi Café, Madame.

ZHOOLIE. And you——

DINDO. I was the waiter.

ZHOOLIE [*embarrassed*]. I—I don't seem to remember a waiter. [*Relieved and ceasing to be romantic but becoming terribly gracious at this suggestion of an old retainer*]. And you have remembered all these years. I am touched, boy. You have moved me—moved a Venable.

DINDO. I have never forgotten. I could never forget. You went out without paying your check. It was two pounds, seven, and eight. They docked me for it.

ZHOOLIE [*trilling with unconvincing delight*]. How like the Venables! How like! But I cannot have you suffer. [*She looks around her with a pretty helplessness, clutches at her pearls, and then decides not to give them, sees VAN LOON's dangling watch-fob, and, while he is picking his teeth, punishes him by taking the watch and handing it splendidly to the bus-boy*]. Noblesse oblige! [*To the others*]. Come—our little hour is spent.

[*ZHOOLIE and her reformed lovers start for the door hand in hand when they are halted by dis-*

264 SHOUTS AND MURMURS

tressed noises from the bus-boy, who has come upon the lunch checks.]

DINDO. But who will pay for these?

ZHOOLIE AND LOVERS [*in chorus*]. God knows!

[*Exeunt.*]

DINDO [*sinking into one of the vacated chairs*].
What does it all mean?

VOICES [*from the empyrean, the wings, the cashier's cage, the kitchen, and the audience*].
God knows!

CURTAIN

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

<http://lib.harvard.edu>

**If the item is recalled, the borrower will
be notified of the need for an earlier return.**

	<div>WIDENER JAN 29 2007 FEB 02 2007 CANCELLED</div>

Thank you for helping us to preserve our collection!



3 2044 019 775 99

